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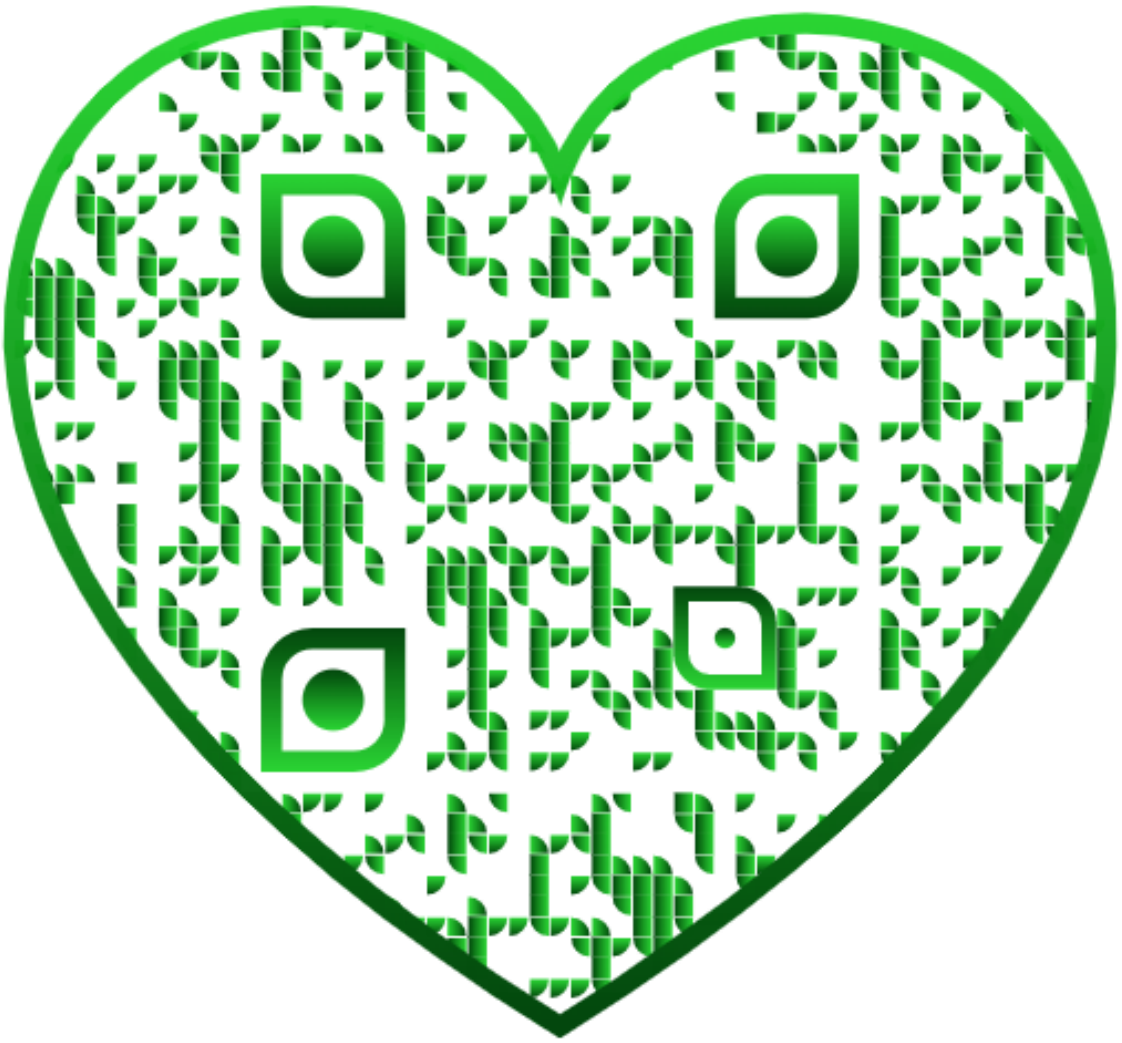

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Take a cup o' kindness

Trump. Brexit. Leicester City winning the Premier League. 2016 has been a year that has confounded the pundits and pollsters, alright, and a year in which we've lost some of the brightest and bravest stars in pop history, numerous legends of the stage and screen and perhaps the greatest ever sportsperson – Muhammad Ali. If one thing really was predictable in 2016, it was that all bets were off. When it comes to guitar gear, is there such a thing as a safe bet? Well, you can bet your bottom dollar (worth £0.80 at the time of writing, thanks a bunch Nigel) that new gear won't make you a better player. Only practice will do that. What new gear can do, though, is inspire – it can be the shot in the arm that shakes you out of those familiar, predictable boxes and transports your playing to parts unknown.

Whether it's a spectral reverb effect that caresses silken arpeggios with its chill fingers or a P-90 pickup that drags you windmilling through a storm of joyous noise, the result is the same – you've ended up in a musical landscape that you wouldn't have visited without that inspirational piece of equipment to show you the way. Whether you are in the market for a toneful acoustic, an affordable electric, a battery-powered bass amp or something else entirely, don't touch that credit card until you've read our essential guide to the best new gear of 2016. Turn to page 21 to find out what you voted for and what our expert reviewers picked out as their highlights of a year in guitar.

As always, we love to hear from you, so please write in and tell us about the great gear you picked up in 2016, and what you hope the new year will bring. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all at *G&B* – see you in 2017!

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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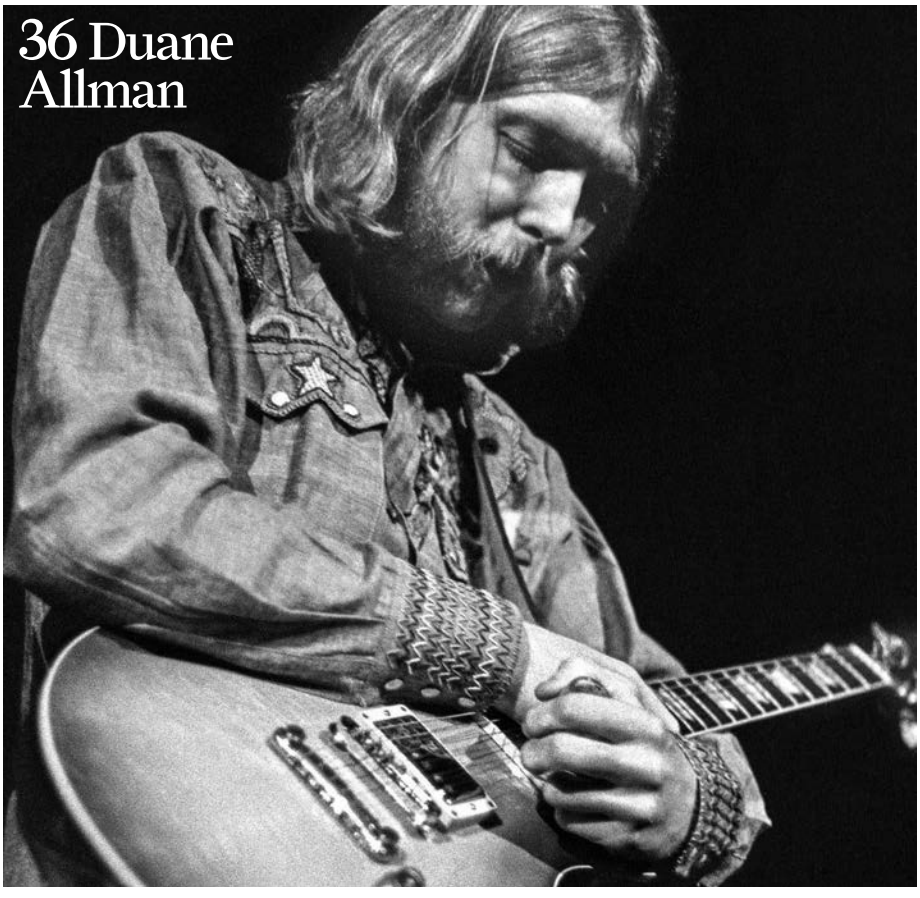

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Opening bars...

LEONARD COHEN 1934–2016

Canadian singer-songwriter, poet and novelist Leonard Cohen died on 7 November, aged 82, at his home in Los Angeles. Widely celebrated as one of music's greatest songwriters, he was acclaimed for his astonishing gift for lyricism, his preoccupation with themes of love, sex, spirituality and mortality, his confessional, melancholy vocal style and his streak of dark humour.

By the mid-1960s, Cohen was already a published poet and novelist, but he'd always had a keen interest in music. He learned folk songs and, at 16, spurred on by Hank Williams songs on the radio, played in a country act – the Buckskin Boys. He turned to songwriting because he wasn't earning enough as a writer, and played clubs while living in New York, where he once jammed with Jimi Hendrix.

Cohen's recording career began at the age of 33, after legendary producer and talent spotter John Hammond signed him up and produced *Songs Of Leonard Cohen*, released in December 1967. He further developed his minimalist folk style over *Songs From A Room* (1969), *Songs Of Love And Hate* (1971) and *New Skin For The Old Ceremony* (1974), before 1977's more experimental *Death Of A Ladies' Man*, co-written and produced by Phil Spector. The 80s saw two of his most significant releases – 1984's *Various Positions* (which contained his masterpiece, *Hallelujah*); and 1988's synth-dominated *I'm Your Man*, his most popular album.

During the 1990s, Cohen explored his spirituality in earnest and even became a monk; but returning to music at the turn of the Millennium, he was surprised to discover in 2004 that he was virtually penniless. Though the courts ruled in his favour after Cohen sued his former manager in 2005, Cohen – now in his 70s – hit the road for five years to perform nearly 400 marathon shows between 2008 and 2013, tuning down two whole steps to accompany the new depth in his "golden voice". He released three albums of new material in the 2010s, recording up until his death.

Cohen may have been self-deprecating about his guitar skills (he once annotated a sketch of his Conde guitar with the words "My guitar is so beautiful sometimes I wish I could play it"), yet he summarised its centrality to him as a musician when he said: "All of my writing has guitars behind it, even the novels." When in his 20s, Cohen had a handful of informal guitar lessons with a Spaniard he met near a tennis court in Montreal. Sadly, the guitar teacher took his own life, but not before he'd taught Cohen a flamenco chord progression: "It was those six chords, it was that guitar pattern, that has been the basis of all my songs, and all my music."

Cohen aficionados have long been in awe of what he called his "chop": the hypnotic classical- or perhaps country-influenced right-hand techniques that grace early songs such as *Avalanche*; *Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye*; *The Partisan* and *The Stranger Song*. Over the years, he toured with an Ovation Classical 1613, a Gibson Chet Atkins CE, and Canadian maker Godin's Multiac ACS Nylon, but is synonymous with his beloved nylon-strung Conde flamenco guitar, bought in the late 1960s.

Given the superficial similarities between the two, Cohen was compared to Bob Dylan throughout his career, and their paths crossed over the decades. Dylan spoke at length to *The New Yorker*'s David Remnick in 2016 of his admiration for his counterpart's writing: "When people talk about Leonard, they fail to mention his melodies, which to me, along with his lyrics, are his greatest genius."

Kris Kristofferson once said that the opening verse of *Bird On The Wire* will be his epitaph. Cohen's 14th and final album, *You Want It Darker* – a collaboration with his son, Adam – released a few weeks before his death, gravitates towards the topic, particularly on the song *Traveling Light*:

I'm travelling light
It's au revoir
My once so bright
My fallen star

I'm running late
They'll close the bar
I used to play one mean guitar

ONES TO WATCH

Honeyblood

BLOOD SISTERS

Released, fittingly, on the eve of bonfire night, Honeyblood's sophomore album, *Babes Never Die*, is an incendiary blast of fuzzed-up pop-punk guitars, hefty drums and infectious choruses. The Glasgow two-piece have been building a sizable reputation in 2016, landing high-profile support slots with Foo Fighters and Courtney Barnett.

The defiant, thundering title track – referencing a mantra that guitarist and singer Stina Tweeddale has tattooed on her ribs – is pure dynamite, toying playfully with the theme of empowerment. It's a song that digs its way into your consciousness and sets up camp, and typifies a record that's got more hooks than an amateur boxing tournament. The album was recorded over an intensive period at London's Fish Factory studio with producer James Dring, whose work with the likes of Jamie T and Gorillaz made him an attractive proposition.

"He's just wonderful," says Tweeddale. "I feel like we hit the jackpot there. Not only did it feel like a collaboration project, but he's brought such a quality to the production. It was a pleasure to go into the studio and work with him every day. I spent a lot of time demoing the album, which was a great process for me, as I didn't do that to the same extent with the first album."

Tweeddale, who describes PJ Harvey and The Breeders as her two biggest musical influences, began her guitar journey early, thanks to the influence of her father: "I started playing guitar at 11 years old, but my father is a working guitarist and guitars were always around. I started writing songs instantly, and on my 16th birthday I got my first electric guitar, which was a sunburst Stratocaster. I grew up listening to my dad play in the house and going to his shows. I also loved Jeff Buckley, Johnny Marr and Graham Coxon."

Despite the formidable noise that Tweeddale and drummer Cat Myers make – as witnessed on a recent UK and US tour – there could be more new arrivals in future as they try to meet the challenge of recreating their frenetic recorded sound on increasingly large stages. "I'm always on the lookout and it's pretty likely that one day we will add some members to the band," says Tweeddale. "In the meantime, it's a constant task to expand the sound for both myself and Cat. I use a whole load of tricks to bring a thickness to the sound, including a couple of amps and an octave pedal on stage.

"On the album, I mostly used my 1989 Japanese Custom Fender Telecaster. I also used a Fender Jaguar and Jazzmaster. Most of the rhythm guitars were done through a 60s Marshall Bluesbreaker, then we used a 70s WEM Dominator, 70s silverface Fender Champ and a handmade valve preamp. For distortion, I use a Pro Co Rat and a Russian Big Muff Pi. We use an EarthQuaker Speaker Cranker on cleaner guitars to add bite, and a load of delays.

"The crowds in the USA are smaller, it's a very different type of experience. We would love to continue our stage show as it is in the UK over there, but it's difficult to take equipment across. I love travelling and playing to crowds in different places, it amazes me still that music has such a broad reach." **GW**

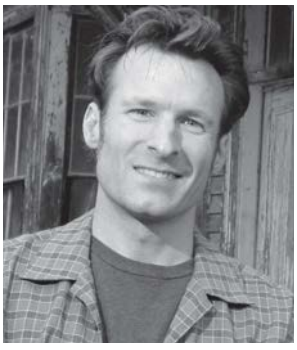
TRY IF YOU LIKE The Breeders, The Joy Formidable

GEAR *Honeyblood*

- **GUITARS** 1989 Japanese Custom Fender Telecaster, Fender Jaguar & Jazzmaster
- **AMPLIFIERS** 1960s Marshall Bluesbreaker, 70s WEM Dominator, 70s Fender Champ

Letters from America

San Francisco amp builder Bruce Clement of BC Audio has a long-held love of octal preamp valves. **DAVE HUNTER** sizes up the JTX50



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

With the vast majority of amp manufacturers using the same nine-pin, small-bottle preamp tubes to populate their creations' front ends, I find anything that differs from the norm to be extremely enticing. BC Audio of San Francisco is all about differing from the norm; namely, Bruce Clement – he of the 'BC' initials – has long had a passion for larger eight-pin (aka 'octal') preamp tubes, and all of his amps are packed with the things.

If you haven't encountered them, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the octal 6SL7s that Clement uses in his designs were stubby 6V6s. Not so. These are dual-triodes that function much like the more common nine-pin ECC83/12AX7 varieties that, oh, some 95 per cent of amps employ, but they are generally known to contribute a slightly thicker, warmer, more full-bodied tone when used right. These are the characteristics that have hooked Clement on the things.

The 6SL7 has an amplification factor of 70, which, when compared to the familiar 12AX7's amplification factor of 100, tells us it's a little cooler. It still has plenty of gusto, though – around the same as a nine-pin 5751, and somewhat more than the 12AY7 used in many Fender tweed amps – and its marginally tamer gain helps it avoid the fizziness that many traditional preamp stages induce when wound up high. Clement further relates that when this octal preamp tube distorts, it does so in a manner more akin to the way an output tube clips, contributing a thicker breed of crunch to the amp's overall distortion. The 6SL7 leant its warm, smooth character to many vintage amps made by Valco, certain eras of the Ampeg Jet and Reverberocket, and others, but it has been a minority component for most contemporary makers. For Clement and his BC Audio designs, however, it's a sort of raison d'être.

Clement originally made a name for himself building his Number series amps, with escalating feature sets. Amplifier No. 7, for example, is a simple 15- or 25-watter with two blendable volume controls and a presence control feeding a cathode-biased output stage. Amplifier No. 8 adds a master volume and a drive control for a more lead-intended tone. Amplifier No. 9 ups it to 45 watts and adds a few more control functions, while No. 10 is BC Audio's fully-featured amp, with nine knobs across the front panel. All are entirely original designs that clone or copy nothing, while producing archetypal and familiar guitar tones that might be labelled 'classic' within the rock spectrum – familiar, therefore, yet something rather new and different, too.

The Octal-Plex series, however, of which this JTX50 is one, seeks to do something else. It is, admittedly, inspired by a legendary transition-era Marshall of the 1960s – to wit, the 'flag logo' JTM50 of around early 1967 which had adopted EL34s but not yet dropped its tube rectifier – but pays homage to that collectible classic by rendering its spirit with Clement's beloved 6SL7 front end, and adding a few nifty mods to enhance performance and usability. The Octal-Plex series also includes the JTX45, which springs from the JTM45 platform with KT66 output tubes, and the JMX50, which does the fully-formed Plexi thing with EL34s and solid-state rectification.

Different class

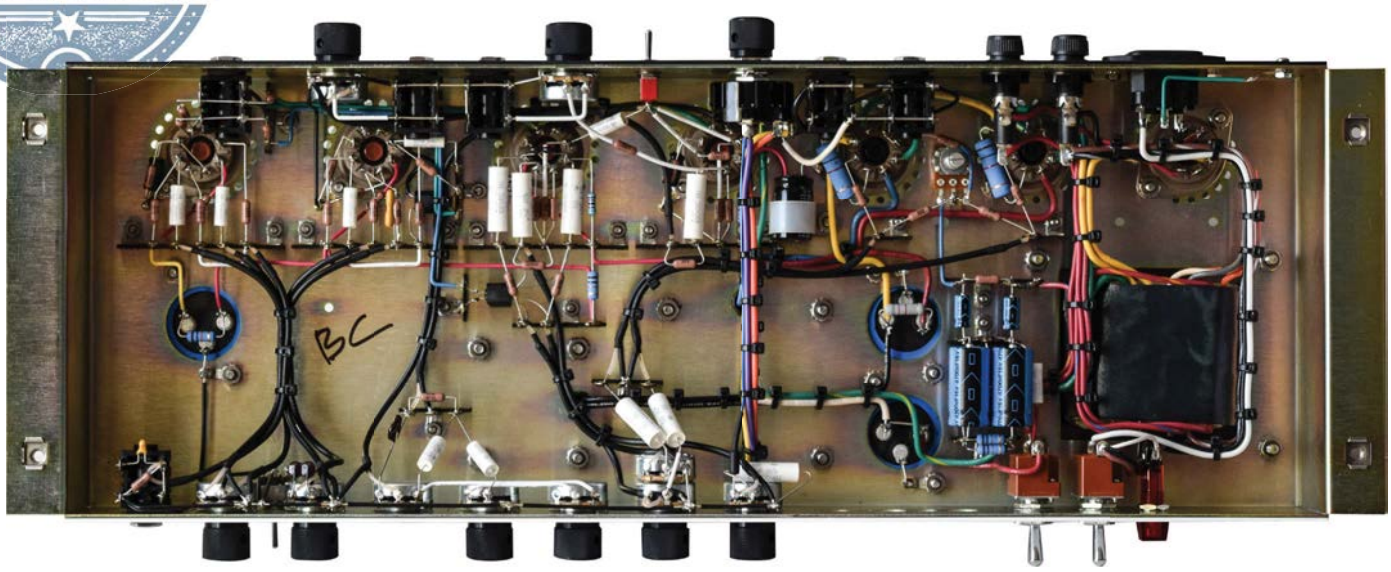
The JTX50 deviates from the available dead-spec clones out there in many ways other than its octal preamp tubes, though. The single input feeds dual Plexi-era normal and bright channels simultaneously, which can then be blended to taste using independent volume controls. In addition to the rest of the traditional EQ knobs, a post-phase-inverter

Clement has long had a passion for eight-pin preamp tubes, and his amps are packed with them

KEY FEATURES

BC Audio JTX50

- **PRICE** £1,931 direct, at the current Brexit-inflected exchange rate (including upgrades for Gain Boost, Volume Boost, and FX Loop; excluding shipping and duties)
- **CONTROLS** Normal Volume, Bright Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, Master Volume, Presence
- **OUTPUT** 50 watts
- **TUBES** Four 6SL7 preamp tubes, two EL34 output tubes; GZ34 rectifier
- **FEATURES** Gain Boost and Volume Boost (both footswitchable), series effects loop with Send and Return level controls; dual speaker outputs with switch for 4, 8 and 16-ohms
- **WEIGHT** 36lbs/16.3kg
- **CONTACT** bcaudio.com



master volume enables heavy grind at lower output levels, and round back a tube-buffered effects loop with both send and return level controls (a $150 upcharge from the base model) accepts a wide range of delay and modulation effects. In addition, this example includes Clement's upgrades for preset gain boost and volume boost ($75 and $100 respectively), which are both footswitch selectable, with a dual-button footswitch included.

Having dutifully named the functions, it's worth diving inside this JTX50 for a look at the impressive work that has gone into it. Clement assembles all of his amps using hand-wired, point-to-point construction bolstered by terminal strips where necessary, with no circuit board, and the result is a very different Plexi gut shot than we're generally used to seeing.

Clement's thinking, like many makers who use such build techniques, is that the shorter wire runs enable greater clarity and less noise. It sure makes for a tidy-looking chassis – itself a custom-made 16-gauge steel affair with heat dispersion holes around all tube sockets to help keep things cool. The transformers are all American-made paper bobbin/paper layer-wound designs by Classic Tone, and other internal components include Mallory signal capacitors and high-quality filter caps.

Tested through a TopHat 2x12 cab with early-80s Celestion G12-65s and a StoneAge 1x12 with EVM 12L Classic, using a Gibson 1959 Les Paul Reissue and a 1957 Telecaster, the JTX50 revealed no major surprises, given the general ballpark of its inspiration, yet it presented a bountiful package of extremely playable and enjoyable textures. Framed in general terms, this amp issues big, fat, juicy guitar tones with, yes, a predisposition towards classic-rock and blues, but more versatility than you might expect.

The JTX50 packs four 6SL7 preamp tubes, two EL34 output tubes and a GZ334 rectifier

It has the soft, round low end of tube-rectified Marshalls, which brings with it a chewy, compliant texture that makes the thing so much fun to play. That being said, being a loud 50-watter, there's plenty of clean headroom at lower volume settings (it remains crystalline up to around 10.30 or 11 o'clock on the dual volume controls with my Les Paul and the amp's master on full, which generates enough volume for almost any 'clean' gig), and it all stays pretty tight at these levels, too. The fun really begins, though, when you advance the volume controls to induce a huge, pillowy crunch that is consistently thick, yet impressively clear, and also delightfully easy to voice thanks to the internal paralleling of the two channels.

Master blaster

The master volume works well, but the amp sounds best with that knob up full (and a Fryette Power Station or a good attenuator in line between amp and speaker cab to reduce the output level when necessary). It's often thus with vintage-leaning preamp stages, though, and in this case the JTX50 seems to reveal its true self – massive body, aggressive midrange thump, appealingly musical harmonic depths – when the master is effectively taken out of the equation. It's an enjoyable, musical and infectious sound generator, and a great alternative in the crowded field of Plexi-alikes.

READER BOARDS

One pedal changed everything for **JOE COOMBS**. He tells us how the Visual Sound Double Trouble transformed his board...

KIT LIST

Joe Coombs

- **PEDALS**
  TC Electronic PolyTune, Diamond Comp Jr, Lovepedal Kalamazoo, Visual Sound V2 Double Trouble, Xotic RC Booster, Dunlop Volume X, Electro-Harmonix Stereo Pulsar, Strymon El Capistan, MXR Carbon Copy, TC Electronic Hall of Fame
- **PATCH CABLES**
  Mixture of Van Damme, MXR and Mogami. Planet Waves American Stage from guitar to board and board to amp
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  Truetone 1Spot Pro CS12
- **BOARD TYPE**
  Pedaltrain 2 with Mono case
- **HEAR IT HERE**
  www.newtoncountry.co.uk

What inspired this setup?
"This setup is my 'meat and potatoes' board. It has all the things on it that I currently need when I play with my country/blues/rock 'n' roll band Newton Country. We have a mixture of vibes, from Johnny Cash to the Eagles, so sometimes I play very clean and then other times quite overdriven. There aren't a lot of bells and whistles on here, but if I need something different it makes its way onto the board. Everything on here gets used at least once in our set."

Tell us a little about the journey...
"I started off many moons ago with a Boss ME-70 and then, after a couple of years, I wanted to branch out and have my own unique selection of sounds. I think my first pedal was a Dunlop Cry Baby and then a Marshall Bluesbreaker II. It all kind of changed when I got the Visual Sound Double Trouble. Which is basically a couple of modded Tube Screamers. I got this brand recommended by my very good friend Ed, and it always sounds great at every gig. This got me on the path to where I've ended up now, and is still on the board to this day because it does so much, although I only really use one side. So, after a lot of playing time and talking to people, I am very happy with what I am privileged to play right now."

Any pedals you are looking to add?
"I'm very tempted by the Strymon Flint, which is just an incredible-sounding pedal. I'm always messing around with my drive section, but at this moment in time I'm happy with everything. Although experimenting with some modulation would be nice, too. Damn!"

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"My main guitar is my beloved 2012 Fender '64 American Vintage Telecaster, but I also have my '92 Squier (Made in Japan) Stratocaster. For all my BB King and Robben Ford moments, I love my Epiphone 1962 50th Anniversary Sheraton. My amps are usually Fenders. I've got a 2004 4x10 tweed Bassman and a 2015 tweed Blues Junior."

What lessons have you learned?
"Definitely 90 per cent of the time, unless you are very sure, it's best to try before you buy. Especially when it comes to any type of gain pedal. The sound will change dramatically according to what amp and guitar you use with it. At the end of the day, just find what makes you sound like you and inspires you to write music. If that's plugging straight into your amp that's great, or if it's running 50 pedals then that's great too. It's a long and expensive journey to finding your sound, but it can also be a highly rewarding one too."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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INTRODUCING

Transmisser

Resonant Reverberations

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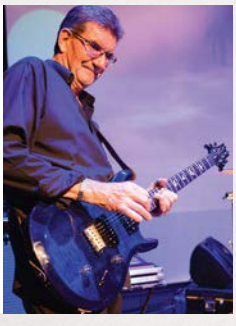

Peter Cochrane

- **TEST INSTRUMENT** PRS S2 Custom 24 (£1,375)
- **BAND** The Illegals
- **MAIN GUITARS, AMPS & PEDALS USED** Music Man HD-130 head built into a 1x12 combo with single Fane Medusa speaker; 1980s DigiTech FX1 twin-valve guitar processor, 1980s Boss delay; StageClix wireless system
- **GIGS SO FAR** Several, including Dunamaise Theatre, Drogheda; Riverside Theatre, Coleraine & Mill Theatre, Dublin

PRS S2 CUSTOM 24

Since taking delivery of the Custom 24 six months ago, **PETER COCHRANE** has been putting it to use in his Eagles tribute band. Is it a keeper?

I've had the S2 Custom in my possession for six months, and I have to say I'm starting to really bond with it. I imagine that 95 per cent of *G&B* readers are not like Joe Bonamassa, Eric Clapton et al... but, like myself, average guitar players who are semi-pro or amateur. They will not own a '59 Burst, and will be looking for an all-round instrument that will cover a variety of styles. So, is this PRS a good choice, and how can my experiences with it help potential buyers decide?

My two main guitars are a Strat and a Les Paul, both of which I've been using for 25 years, so it's not easy for me to pick up a brand new guitar and have confidence that it will be able to cover all bases. In order to give the PRS a fair crack, I decided to gig it as a direct replacement for the Les Paul, and simply used it in those songs where the Les Paul would have been the standard.

The PRS did not disappoint, but I would consider it to be more like an SG replacement. The body is obviously much lighter than the Les Paul (no bad thing), and the pickups are powerful and provide almost as much sustain as the Les Paul – in truth, they're probably slightly brighter and have a little more clarity. All round, both humbuckers are very pleasing and I would have absolutely no issue with using the PRS instead of the Les Paul, sound-wise. The fretboard is slightly more rounded than the Les Paul's, and the guitar still needs quite a bit of playing in. Having said that, I love the fact that it has 24 frets.

Having decided that I could trust the PRS to fulfil that side of the job, I then tried to use it to cover some of the parts normally reserved for the Strat, utilising the coil-tap on both humbucking pickups. Again, the PRS did not disappoint. The coil-tap provides clean rhythm tones that are bright and punchy with exceptional clarity. Crank up the overdrive with the bridge pickup coil-tapped and you get a beautifully crisp, cutting tone for soloing.

Turning to the mechanics of the guitar, I was very impressed with the locking tuners. The PRS is strung from under and through the bridge, and each tuning post has a locking screw, so you simply pull the string through, lock with the screw and trim off. About half a turn will bring the string to pitch. It is very easy to change strings, and the guitar stays in tune well during performance.

In my first report, I mentioned my initial reservations regarding the guitar, but these are very personal as I am used to a slightly flatter fretboard, but I'm getting used to the PRS. I have a minor issue with the vibrato arm, which I find gets in the way of the controls, and I would prefer a push-push coil-tap rather than the push-pull as fitted. I'm sure other players have their preferences, and these are minor issues that won't prevent me from using the guitar.

In summary, would I recommend the PRS? It's a yes from me. Will it replace my old friends of 25 years? Well, possibly not entirely. But for anyone out there looking for a very versatile instrument that's beautifully finished, with a great range of tones, locking string nuts, 24 frets and a vibrato arm – You must at the very least consider the PRS.

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Glenn Hughes

Former Deep Purple ace selects nine choice cuts from his collection

Former Deep Purple vocalist and bass player Glenn Hughes released his 12th studio solo album, *Resonate*, in November. Since splitting with Purple in 1976 Hughes has fronted Black Country Communion and California Breed and worked with acts and artists as diverse as KLF and Tony Iommi. In 2016, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with Deep Purple.

Glenn Hughes' new album, Resonate, is out now on Frontiers Music.

The Beatles
SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND

"Without a shadow of a doubt, this was my musical encyclopedia as a teenager. I could not stop playing this album when I was at school. I was intrigued not only by the songwriting, but the incredible musicianship of these four gentlemen. Macca ruled on bass, and John took me to a higher place on *A Day In The Life*."

The Rolling Stones
EXILE ON MAIN ST

"A journey into a new place for me, a fearless album. You could feel a cohesive interaction between Mick and Keith, and there were wild shenanigans going on in the French countryside on the making of this record. It's a wild, rough-and-tumble adventure, recorded with band members in different locations in the chateau. It is a dark, wild ride, full of alchemy."

Stevie Wonder
MUSIC OF MY MIND

"Every artist has their own choice and favourite, and Stevie spoke to me loud and clear on this life-changing album. *Music Of My Mind* would be the first of a string of musical daydreamers and night schemers. To me, it's still mind-blowing to this day. Stevie became my friend and mentor, and he very much still is."

Free
FREE

"My band, Trapeze, played with Free in Wolverhampton in 1970. We had no idea who they were, as this was before *All Right Now*, so I stood in the audience and I was overwhelmed with a sense of joy and peace. Paul Rodgers, Andy Fraser, Paul Kossoff and Simon Kirke were only teenagers, playing with real honesty and soul."

Sly & The Family Stone
THERE'S A RIOT GOING ON

"This Sly & The Family Stone album, recorded in the States, was another real life-changing moment for me. I absolutely love their less-is-more rhythm section, featuring brother Larry Graham on bass. Sly's bad-ass vocal swagger did a number on me, as well, and it had the effect of turning Trapeze into a funk-rock trio."

Marvin Gaye
WHAT'S GOING ON?

"Marvin's soulful melodies and lyrical content about the Vietnam war dug deep into my soul. This album moved me and still does. Marvin was in a supremely soulful space on this heavily political record – possibly the greatest pop record about global war. His voice soothes and captures every nuance of pure soul. He had me from the first bar of this opus. RIP Marvin."

David Bowie
STATION TO STATION

"David was living at my home in Beverly Hills when making this masterpiece. I was privy to David's private world, and to observe him during the making of this album deeply inspired me. He was fearless, wrote musically on the spot, was eccentrically spontaneous and wrote lyrics at the control desk. The return of the Thin White Duke indeed... you are loved and missed my brother."

The Allman Brothers
LIVE AT FILLMORE EAST

"A blues classic – Duane and Gregory, a beautiful combination. Duane with his beautiful solos and slide guitar, and Gregg vocally relaxed. The brothers were the epitome of Southern rock. Trapeze spent a lot of time in Macon, Georgia. Live At The Fillmore was raw, organic and really live. There were lovers and fighters, children, dogs, cats and hippies galore onstage."

Prince
THE VERY BEST OF PRINCE

"It's impossible to name only one Prince song or one Prince album. He was a master of all. He played every instrument on most of his albums. Music flowed through him 24/7. Delicate, nasty, funkified – Prince knew no colour, he was from a higher place. I got to see him a number of times before he passed away. I know that God exists, because of artists like Prince."

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Post Modern Tone Zone Tele - candy apple red £2,369
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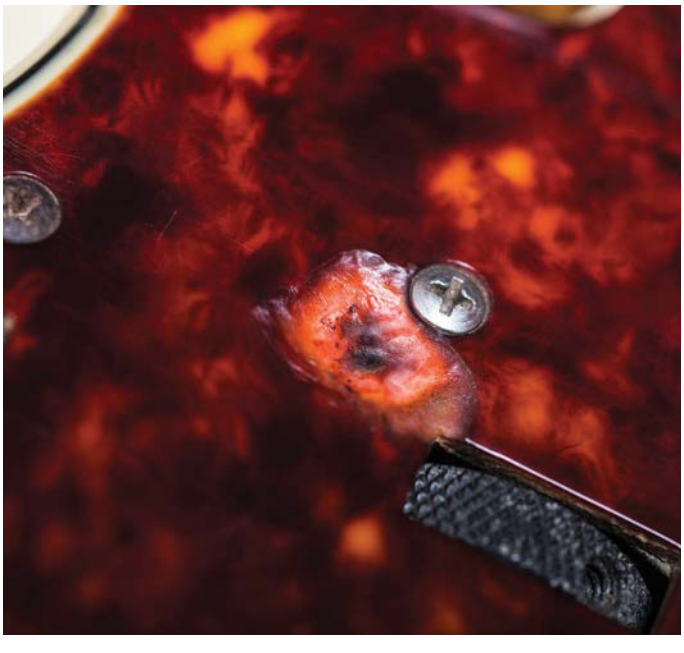
The Money Shot

If you're looking for a vintage bargain, we've got news for you: they do still exist. Gardiner Houlgate in Corsham, Wiltshire is the place to go for specialist guitar auctions, with the next sale scheduled for 8 December 2016. Among the mouth-watering lots on offer is this gorgeous vintage Fender Jazzmaster. The neck has an October 1962 date stamp, and while the body has been refinished, it's already starting to check nicely. The beautifully played-in neck is a thing of wonder, and the original pickups deliver a glorious mixture of bite and woody depth. To see and hear this guitar in action alongside an equally enticing 1966 Telecaster, visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine. Head to www.guitar-auctions.co.uk for more information on this instrument and to browse hundreds of other listings.

PAT. PEND.

Fender
JAZZMASTER



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Chris Vinnicombe
Editor

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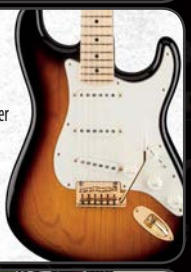

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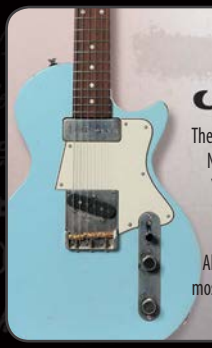

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GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016

Although it's likely to go down in the history books as the year of Trump, Brexit and currency freefall, there's little doubt that 2016 has seen an enormous amount of new gear unleashed on the market. Tradition dictates that our Gear Of The Year shortlist is compiled thusly. First, we assemble a long list of all of the products that have scored nine or 10 out of 10 (with the addition of one or two wildcard products that may have just missed out on scoring a nine but still captured our imagination) over the last 12 months and split them into appropriate categories. Our expert panel of gear reviewers then sit around a table and, after an extended session of spirited debate and arm-wrestling, the long list eventually becomes a shortlist and the *G&B* team members cast their votes. In November, the shortlist was put to the vote on guitar-bass.net and thousands of you voiced your opinions, which accounted for 50 per cent of the weighting on the final results. Democracy may have confounded the pollsters elsewhere this year, but not here: before you spend another penny on gear, read on for a mouth-watering selection of the finest guitars, amps, effects, bass gear and accessories that 2016 had to offer. All come highly commended, and in each category we've crowned an overall champ. Your shopping list starts here...

BEST ELECTRIC GUITAR

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We're kicking off with the big one, and though we thought that guitarists with four figures to splash out on a new electric in 2015 had an abundance of choice, the market in 2016 has been even more hotly contested, with offset designs a clear trend. Instruments from K-Line, John Page Classic and Gretsch narrowly missed out, but here's our final five...

Novo Guitars Serus T

- **PRICE** £2,599
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 06
- **CONTACT** Coda Music
  www.coda-music.com

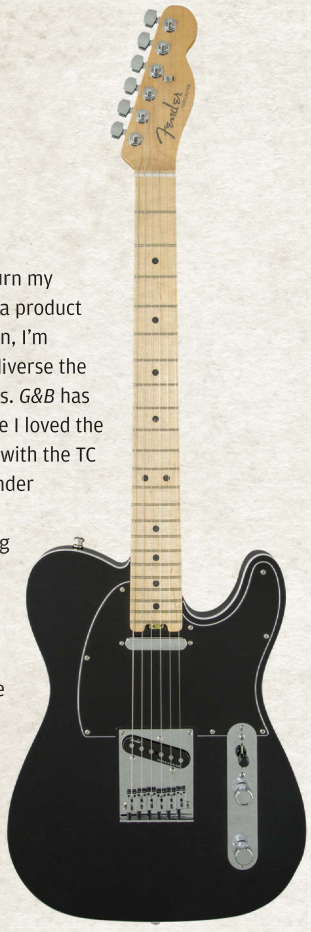
Chris Vinnicombe: "I'd always been a fan of Dennis Fano's designs, but it only took a few moments with the Serus T to realise that the Pennsylvania-based luthier has raised his game to a new level. Initially, I was struck by the remarkable acoustic volume and resonance of this solidbody, which Fano has achieved through the use of tempered red pine. Fano explained: 'Tempering is a highly scientific drying process that the wood undergoes to make it lighter, stiffer and more stable than the industry-standard kiln-dried wood. Tempered wood is more resonant and has a longer natural sustain than kiln-dried woods. The finished weight of the instrument is something that has to be considered before you start building – keeping a close eye on the weight of the raw lumber is crucial.' The neck is glorious: its profile is like a slightly fuller version of Fender's transition-era neck shape, and the compound fingerboard radius helps ensure that playability is easy all over the fretboard. The Amalfitano pickups are airy and very old-sounding – there's a sophistication and edge-of-microphony complexity that you rarely hear from a new instrument. This is a very special guitar indeed – we look forward to being dazzled by whatever Dennis Fano has in store for us in 2017."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Fender American Elite Telecaster

- **PRICE** £1,389-£1,439
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 08
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700
  www.fender.com

Simon Bradley: "Whenever I turn my creaking memory to choosing a product for a Gear Of The Year rundown, I'm reminded just how excitingly diverse the modern choice of guitar gear is. *G&B* has reviewed some great stuff this year and, while I loved the Godin Session and still regularly play around with the TC Electronic Ditto x4, my pick of 2016 is the Fender American Elite Series Telecaster, a modern polishing of an unquestionable classic. Setting aside the outstanding playability and the merits of the numerous salient refinements Fender introduced across the entire Elite series, it was the guitar's contrasting tones that really pushed my buttons. Combining the superb new pickups in series via the S-1 switching system allows proceedings to veer from a classic Country twang to a uniquely fulsome roar in a drumbeat, making this a Tele you could conceivably wield for any gig. The two Elite Strats we also looked at were pretty special, too, but there's nothing cooler than a truly great Tele, and the recollection of the gorgeous Mystic Black finish of our review example still triggers the occasional wistful sigh. Leo got it so right back in 1951, but this is a Tele for today and I remain utterly smitten."



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Fano Standard JM6

- **PRICE** £1,989
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** Coda Music
  www.coda-music.com

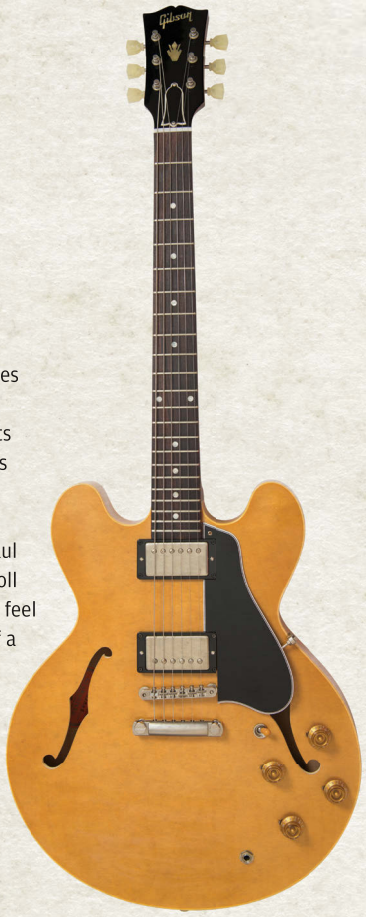
He may have left the company that bears his name, but Dennis Fano's earlier designs are still being manufactured in Scottsdale, Arizona by Premier Builders Guild in a workshop headed up by Jack Schwarz, a Fender veteran of more than 30 years. The Standard series delivers a more affordable Fano than the customisable Alt de Facto range, but the JM6 doesn't feel like a compromise: it sounds and looks great, and playability is infectious.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Gibson Memphis 1958 ES-335 VOS

- **PRICE** £3,299
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 08
- **CONTACT** Gibson
  www.gibson.com

1958 was also the year of the sunburst Les Paul, the Flying V and the Explorer, but Gibson's thinline archtop was arguably its greatest achievement. This reissue winds the clock back to the earliest ES-335 models with unbound fingerboards, and the chunky neck feels more like a Les Paul Junior. There's something very rock 'n' roll about the stripped-down, student guitar feel combined with the white-knuckle ride of a big semi and we can't get enough of it.

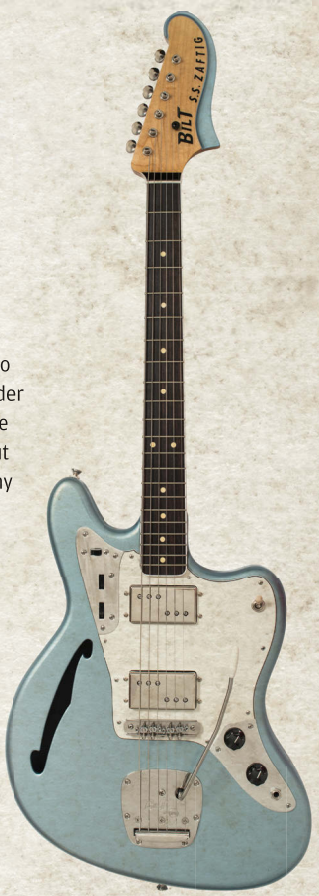


HIGHLY COMMENDED

Bilt Guitars S.S. Zaftig

- **PRICE** £2,489
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 02
- **CONTACT** Coda Music
  www.coda-music.com

They Bilt this pretty for rock 'n' roll and no mistake. Borrowing heavily from the Fender Marauder, Starcaster and Jaguar to create a kind of 'guitar that might have been, but never was', the Des Moines, Iowa company owned by Bill Henss and Tim Thelen has put together a highly-evolved offset with excellent sounds, courtesy of Lollar Regal pickups, and a trouble-free playing experience thanks in no small part to the smooth and stable Mastery bridge and vibrato.



BEST ELECTRIC GUITAR
UNDER £1,000

When it comes to value for money, several of the big brands stepped up to the plate this year with updated entry-level and mid-price models bristling with features that have trickled down from their premium-priced instruments. Gretsch is conspicuous for having two guitars shortlisted, but it was impossible to resist as the company revamped its Electromatic line and created a whole new, ludicrously affordable and highly modifiable range in the shape of the Streamliner series. We expect the GAS to continue flowing throughout 2017...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

Gretsch G5420T Electromatic

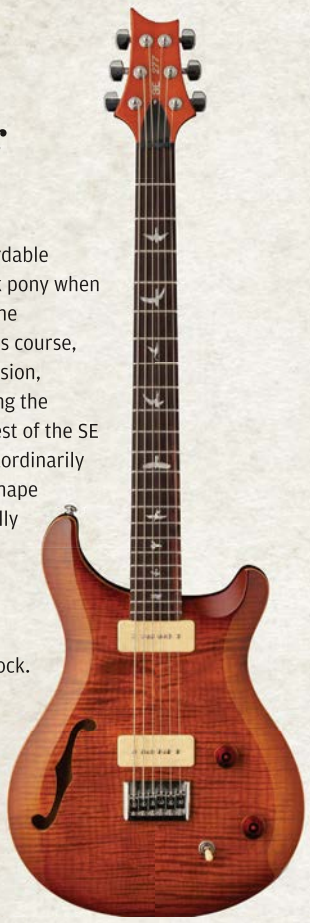
- **PRICE** £709
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** Fender GBI, 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

After Gretsch wowed us with its brilliant entry-level Streamliner series earlier this year, the only way was up for the revamped mid-priced Electromatic line, and what a guitar this fully-hollow G5420T is. The build quality impressed us enormously for a guitar in this price bracket, delivering old-school Gretsch aesthetics and silky modern playability. The Blacktop Filter'Trons sound just as those pickups should – providing that undeniable whiff of twangy authenticity, but with a little added bark and grit. It's a serious Gretsch at an affordable price, which also provides oodles of customisation potential. There's never been a better time to buy a new Gretsch, and this Fairlane Blue beauty stole the hearts of everyone at *G&B* in 2016.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

PRS SE 277 Semi-Hollow Soapbar

- **PRICE** £795
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 05
- **CONTACT** PRS Guitars **www.prsguitars.com**

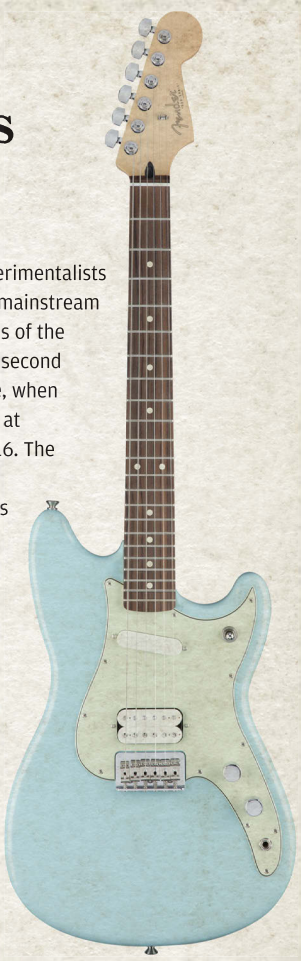


Far from being just for metalheads, this affordable baritone from PRS proved it was no one-trick pony when it arrived in the *G&B* office last winter. With the Korean-made SE Mushok model having run its course, Doug Shive, the head honcho of PRS's SE division, decided that it was time for an update to bring the brand's baritone offering into line with the rest of the SE stable. The level of fit and finish here is extraordinarily good for the money, and the Wide Fat neck shape makes this an easy, stable player with carefully chosen PRS SE Soapbar pickups. The bite of P-90s, combined with a little additional air from the semi-solid construction, add up to what is a hugely versatile proposition for everything from retro twang to modern alt-rock.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Fender Duo-Sonic HS

- **PRICE** £509
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 03
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI **www.fender.com**

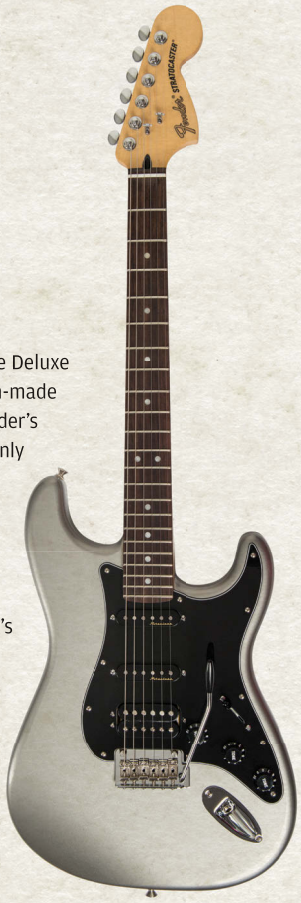


Increasing numbers of hip modern-day experimentalists and indie noiseniks turned to Fender's less mainstream designs for inspiration in 2016, with the likes of the Jaguar, Jazzmaster and Mustang enjoying a second renaissance. It was a smart move, therefore, when Fender launched a slew of cool new models at made-in-Mexico prices at the tail end of 2016. The Duo-Sonic HS was our pick of the bunch. Its cool-looking body shape mirrors the model's original 1956 outline, the build quality is great for the price, it delivers a wide range of brash sounds from its Duo-Sonic humbucking and single-coil pickups and old-school fans of the Seattle sound will absolutely love it. It's more robust than vintage examples, too. A whole lot of guitar for the money.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Fender Deluxe Stratocaster HSS

- **PRICE** £679
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI **www.fender.com**

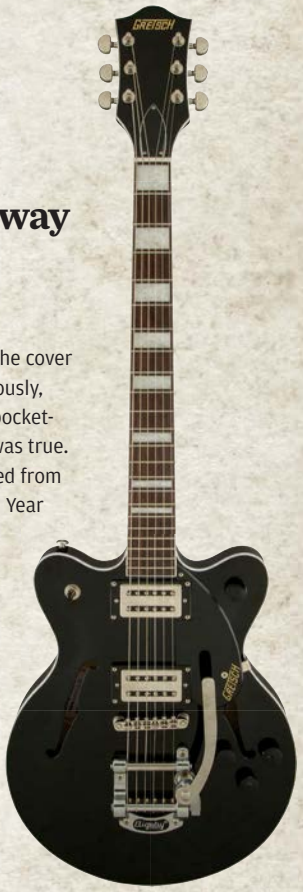


Revealed at Summer NAMM in Nashville, the Deluxe Strat HSS is part of a new-for-2016, Mexican-made Deluxe range, a sort of 'little brother' to Fender's high-end American Elite Series – but it certainly doesn't feel like a low-spec option. With Vintage Noiseless single-coil pickups, a modern bridge, locking tuners with vintage-style buttons, 12-inch fingerboard radii, 'Tall Narrow' frets, contoured heel, 'enhanced' electronics, and pearloid dots, it's a full feature set for the price. We were impressed by the HSS' versatile range of single-coil and humbucking tones, too. All in all, it's an excellent contemporary Stratocaster for the gigging player who needs to cover a variety of bases.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Gretsch Streamliner G2655T Double Cutaway

- **PRICE** £395
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 06
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI **www.gretschguitars.com**



"A real Gretsch for less than £400?" asked the cover line of our March issue, somewhat incredulously, following the release of Gretsch's updated pocket-money Streamliner Collection. And, yes, it was true. In truth, any of the three guitars we reviewed from the series could have made our Gear Of The Year shortlist, but it was the G2655T that stood out – its stylish classic Gretsch double-cut outline, pair of Broad'Tron pickups that sit somewhere between a Filter'Tron and PAF-style humbucker, B50 Bigsby, easy playability and versatile range of tones had us checking the price tag twice – and then reaching for our wallets. When you factor in the potential for modding, too, it's a price too good to ignore.

BEST AMPLIFIERS

OVER £1,000

Another year goes by and another clutch of high-end amplifiers gets added to the 'play before you die' list. Any member of this quintet could have scooped the prize and it was a close-run thing, but in the end the winner is an amplifier that can hold its own in the living room as well as it can at small gigs. There's never been a better time to bring boutique tone home...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

Tone King Falcon Grande

- **PRICE** £2,199
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 07
- **CONTACT** Coda Music **www.coda-music.com**

With its sharp retro looks, 20 watts of all-valve power, onboard attenuator, spring reverb and three distinct tones – rhythm, tweed and lead – the Tone King Falcon Grande isn't cheap, but for smaller gigs, home practice and recording, it's simply outstanding. The bigger brother to the original 12-watt, 1x10 Falcon, whether you throw garage blues, yacht rock, classic-rock, funk or pretty much anything else at it short of modern metal, the Grande delivers with aplomb. In an ideal world, every home or studio would have one.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Dr. Z Z-Lux

- **PRICE** £2,099
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 03
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars **www.peachguitars.com**

Many players love the Deluxe Reverb because you can crank it up in pubs and clubs. The drawback is that 22 watts doesn't necessarily provide enough clean headroom when you're playing bigger gigs or with a loud drummer. The Z-Lux has four 6V6 power valves and a half-power switch, so it can run at 40 or 20 watts, while maintaining the juicy 6V6 tone that we love from small- and medium-sized American amps, with sonic fairy dust to die for thanks to outstanding reverb and tremolo.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

SWART MOD 84

- **PRICE** £1,699
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 12
- **CONTACT** Coda Music **www.coda-music.com**

North Carolina's finest is fast becoming a favourite American amp brand for several members of the team. Michael Swart's amps are so resolutely Americana that it was surprising to see him use Brit-flavoured EL84s in this magical-sounding amp with superb touch-response and beautiful, unobtrusive onboard reverb and tremolo effects.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Elektra 185

- **PRICE** €2,445
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 06
- **CONTACT** **www.elektra-amps.com**

Huw Price: "Resurrecting a pre-WWII amplifier may seem inauspicious, but the Elektra 185 is a painstakingly accurate recreation of the Gibson EH-185. Cathode-biased 'coke bottle' 6L6s combine with three 6SQ7 octal preamp valves to send 14W through a Celestion Gold speaker. From old-school jazz tone to Neil Young meltdown, this is an outstanding amp built by a true enthusiast."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

BAD CAT USA PLAYER'S SERIES CUB 15R

- **PRICE** £1,329
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 12
- **CONTACT** Coda Music **www.coda-music.com**

For the USA Player Series, Bad Cat swapped its customary hand-wired, point-to-point construction for PCBs and introduced plate-style digital reverb instead of a spring tank, all to drive down costs and assembly time and make for a more affordable amplifier for the real-world player. The EF86 preamp mode is aggressive and complex: a real slice of boutique EL84 tone for sensible money.

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BEST AMPLIFIERS UNDER £1,000

We're getting tired of hearing ourselves say it, but there's no getting away from the fact that we guitarists have never had it so good when it comes to affordable amplification. Think back to the 1990s – pickings were slim and backlines were unwieldy. The same technological march that first shrank our record collections into our phones and then pushed them into the cloud has finally come of age for guitarists, and each of this trio sees tone and tech combine with formidable results...

Blackstar ID:Core Stereo 150

- **PRICE** £329
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** www.blackstaramps.com

Over the last couple of years, Blackstar has helped redefine expectations of what a home/practice amp can deliver. Imagine that the Northampton company took all of the clever functionality and proprietary technology that made its ID:Core amps so popular in the first place – six voices, Super Wide Stereo, deep editing and patch storage, USB recording – and made it available in a loud, gig-ready box that keeps up with a drummer and doesn't cause you to slip a disc during load-in. That's pretty much the ID:Core Stereo 150 in a nutshell – the asking price is mind-bogglingly good value for money and there's even an onboard looper so the fun doesn't have to stop when your bandmates go home. Our winner at a canter.

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Award-Session BluesBaby 22

- **PRICE** £429
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 07
- **CONTACT** Award-Session www.award-session.com

Fact: a well-maintained, high-quality valve amp will give you more than half a century of service. We don't buy into the idea that valve amps are inherently 'unreliable', but there's no doubt plenty of players are searching for valve tone without the erm, downsides. Although more and more players are turning to digital technology by the likes of Fractal and Kemper, at the more affordable end of the market Award-Session's Stewart Ward wowed us earlier this year with this valve-free take on a Blues Junior with "totally convincing valve tones, both clean and overdriven." Ward says his 'constant current drive' is responsible for putting "solid-state amps into the valve amp league."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Hughes & Kettner TubeMeister Deluxe 20

- **PRICE** £649
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 08
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes www.jhs.co.uk

This little lunchbox head may not initially have appeared particularly luxurious, but Hughes & Kettner crammed plenty of goodies into it, including a preamp influenced by the TriAmp MKIII, Red Box cabinet emulation, power attenuation and plenty more besides. A 20-watt EL84 amp that you can gig with, thanks to its compact 355x155x150mm form factor, the TubeMeister Deluxe 20 also integrates remarkably well into a home-studio setup, looking as cool on a desktop next to your computer as it does atop a cabinet. Valves may be 'old' tech, but this is proof that valve amps can integrate seamlessly into the modern guitarist's world.

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BEST ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Small, parlour-sized bodies, slot headstocks and Depression Era cosmetics have been major trends in the acoustic guitar world during the last 12 months and show no sign of going away any time soon. Likewise torrefaction. There's a pleasing simplicity about our five finalists, and the winner is an instrument that the whole *G&B* team still swoon over...

Martin 00-17S

- **PRICE** £1,795
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 02
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution, 0141 248 4812 **www.martinguitar.com**

Huw Price: "Most electric guitars can produce passable results with a decent amp or stompbox, but an acoustic guitar either grabs you or not – and if it doesn't there's not much you can do about it. I immediately liked the Martin 00-17S, and before long I was besotted with it. There are things that I like and dislike about traditional mid-sized Martins. For instance, the touch sensitivity combined with airy, almost delicate treble inspires me to play fingerstyle, but I generally crave more guts and woody fullness in the midrange. In other words, my ideal medium-bodied Martin would be one that has a bit of Gibson L-00 or J-45 thrown into the mix, and that pretty much describes the sonic character of the Martin 00-17S. The fact that Martin made it drop-dead gorgeous with slope shoulders, an antique sunburst and wonderful open-geared Golden Age tuners adds to the allure. The 24 7/8" scale length and slim neck contribute to the easy-playing feel and the string-to-string balance can make some of us sound like better acoustic players than we really are. If you like rootsy acoustic tone and enjoy playing with open tunings, capos and bottlenecks, the 00-17S cannot be faulted."

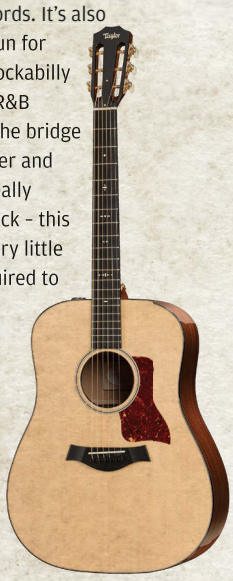
Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Taylor 510E

- **PRICE** £2,401
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 01
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**

This slot-headstock electro is a bluegrass natural and any basslines you pick out balance superbly with strummed chords. It's also tremendous fun for banging out rockabilly rhythms and R&B grooves. Tap the bridge with your finger and you'll feel a really strong kick-back – this means that very little energy is required to get the soundboard moving, making it a remarkably adept fingerpicker.

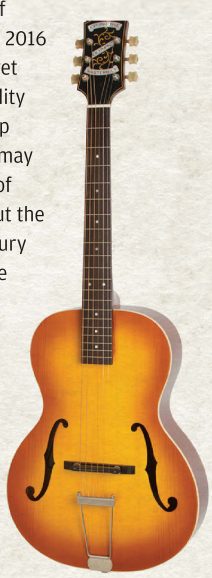


HIGHLY COMMENDED

Epiphone Masterbilt Olympic

- **PRICE** £499
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 01
- **CONTACT** Gibson Europe **www.epiphone.com**

After a hiatus of about 70 years, 2016 saw Epiphone get back in the quality acoustic-archtop business. They may look like relics of the Jazz Age, but the Masterbilt Century models combine deference to the past with modern convenience: the most affordable of the bunch was our favourite.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Larrivée P-03Z

- **PRICE** £1,079
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 10
- **CONTACT** Sound Technology 01462 480000 **www.soundtech.co.uk**

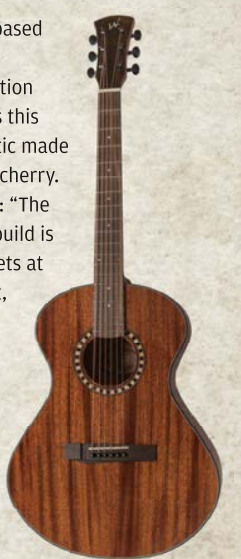
Zebrano is a lovely timber with an olive or pale coffee hue and dark brown grain lines. Reputed to lie between rosewood and mahogany on the tonal spectrum, here, on this Californian parlour guitar, it helps squeeze as much sound as possible from its 24-inch scale.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Andrew White Cybele 100J Jatoba

- **PRICE** £279
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 10
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597 **www.andrewwhiteguitars.com**

West Virginia-based luthier Andrew White's Production Series contains this all-solid acoustic made from Brazilian cherry. Huw Price said: "The quality of the build is as good as it gets at this price point, and it's always intriguing to hear new tones from unfamiliar timber."



BEST EFFECTS

Two types of pedal dominate this year: drive and ambience. It's no coincidence that the enduring appeal of the former is pretty much universal among electric guitarists, and the latter is riding on a self-oscillating wave of popularity amongst younger bands on both sides of the Atlantic right now. People say there are no guitar heroes these days: cobblers. There are plenty, they are just more concerned with texture than posture.

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

MXR M300 Reverb

- **PRICE** £187
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 01
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution 0844 326 2000 **www.jimdunlop.com**

MXR's M300 made an early impression in the 2016 gear stakes, catching *G&B*'s eye at Winter NAMM back in January. While there are more fully-featured reverb pedals from the likes of Strymon, Eventide and EarthQuaker Devices on the market, the M300 belies its simple three-knob configuration, with a host of digital algorithms under the hood. It's a good £300 cheaper than some of those high-spec digital reverb machines, too. From convincing traditional sounds such as plate, spring and room to the atmospheric mod, epic and pad modes that will keep post-rock players and soundscapers happy, everything is well voiced. Plugging in an expression pedal ups the functionality still further, enabling huge volume swells. The M300 has an impressively low noise floor and it's ideally suited to live use thanks to the simple colour-coded system of LED lights that display green or red depending on the mode selected. Editor Chris Vinnicombe concluded: "It's not the cheapest, nor does it have the most voices in a small stompbox format, but the M300 nails it sonically where it counts."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Supro 1305 Drive

- **PRICE** £169
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 10
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865381 **www.suprousa.com**

Richard Purvis: "All the throaty grind of a vintage Supro amp in a stompbox... without a valve in sight? It sounds like marketing puff, but give this little blue gem a chance to show what it can do and your cynicism will be dispelled. The Supro Drive sounds great at minimum gain, beefing up your tone with a hint of grit, and the fun keeps coming as you turn it up. The coil-tap switch gives you two voices: one bold and woody, one fuzzy and compressed. Coil-tapping what, exactly? An internal mini-transformer. This isn't a transparent overdrive – everything it does is markedly chunkier than the bypass tone – yet it's still touch-sensitive. It won't smooth over your mistakes, but if you play gently it will go with you... just like a good vintage amp. And that's why the Supro Drive was on a shortlist of one as my pick of 2016."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Stone Deaf PDF-2

- **PRICE** £139
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 10
- **CONTACT** **www.stonedeaffx.com**

The successor to the PDF-1 Parametric Distortion Filter used to wantonly noisy effect by Josh Homme of Queens Of The Stone Age, left *G&B* with massive grins on our faces when we first encountered it in July. More versatile than the original from the Brit boutique builders, the PDF-2 is all about EQ filtering and overdrive. It can deliver a good approximation of a full-frequncy boost on the clean channel, and the dirty channel brings everything from beefy medium-gain overdrive to something not far short of full-on fuzz into play. With the addition of an expression pedal, filter sweeping, wah and manual tone-shifting effects become possible. Mr Homme may soon be splashing out on a PDF-2, and *G&B* would advise you to follow his lead.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

J Rockett Archer Ikon

- **PRICE** £165
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 08
- **CONTACT** J Rockett Audio Designs **www.rockettpedals.com**

The Ikon was the winner of our fiercely-contested low-gain overdrive shootout back in May, and is the sister pedal of the winner of the effects section in 2015's Gear Of The Year, the silver Archer. The Ikon is quite simply the closest you're going to get to the hallowed sounds of the Klon Centaur, discontinued in 2009. That's partly because it was created by Chris Van Tassel and Jay Rockett, who worked with Bill Finnegan on his Klon KTR pedal brand. When *G&B* pitted the Ikon against the ThorpyFX Peacekeeper and Wampler Tumnus, editor Chris Vinnicombe wrote: "The best clean boost of the bunch, with a lovely high-end sheen you won't want to switch off. 95 per cent of the Klon experience for 10 per cent of the price."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Hudson Electronics Broadcast

- **PRICE** £155
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 07
- **CONTACT** Hudson Electronics **www.hudsonelectronicsuk.com**

Yorkshire effects company Hudson Electronics hand-builds all of its pedals using the finest new old stock components, and the Broadcast is possibly its greatest triumph to date. Its RAF blue enclosure simply screams "NEVE" to any self-respecting audiophile. It's a superlative preamp based on Neve topology with NOS germanium transistors and a steel-core Triad transformer, and is one of *G&B*'s favourite clean boosts. The Broadcast also boasts almost unparalleled versatility. The high-gain switch adds harmonic overtones aplenty, and it excels at everything from Voxy jangle to Marshall-like roar and even extreme, 60s-style fuzz.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Caroline Kilobyte

- **PRICE** £199
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 03
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group **www.carolineguitar.com**

Gary Walker: "My favourite delay pedal of recent times had been Red Witch's Titan. However, the Kilobyte stole in at the 11th month to take the prize. The true brilliance of this analogue-sounding digital pedal lies in the attack knob – which controls the amount of gain the overdrive preamp applies, giving the Kilobyte a wickedly gritty lo-fi sound – and the Havoc switch. Scuzzy repeats build into a seething mass and tip over into self-oscillation as you hold down the switch – and then die away as you lift off. Riding this switch like an accelerator pedal as you play clean arpeggios or open chords over the top of the mayhem is as much fun as I've had with a pedal this year."

BEST BASS PRODUCT

From boutique retro four-strings to affordable and credible-sounding small amplifiers, bassists have had a very good 2016 indeed. Here's our pick of the bunch for lovers of all things low...

Sandberg Forty Eight Bass

- **PRICE** £149
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 01
- **CONTACT** Synergy Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.sandberg-guitars.de**

Gareth Morgan: "For the second year in a row, I simply had to pick a Sandberg bass as my favourite bit of gear. The superb Forty Eight is named after an iconic Harley-Davidson motorcycle engine, its design intelligently and very skilfully evoking a pair of Gibson classics, the Thunderbird and Explorer. The Forty Eight oozes rock 'n' roll from every pore, a vibe amplified by the expertly realised hardcore aged finish and enhanced further by the old-school tortoiseshell scratchplate that tracks the dorsal fin horn. Aside from being tough to access the highest registers, the California Series neck, with its 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, is a supremely playable beast – and a headstock from the same series ensures decent balance. Active electronics and Sandberg Powerhumbucker/Splitcoil pickups produce growling width and pleasing aggression across the neck with splendid midrange definition and highs with plenty of bite. Factor in the thuddy, P-Bass-like Powerhumbucker and fat, barky Splitcoil options and you've got a plethora of high-quality tones. The Forty Eight may not be the best all-rounder currently on the market, but that was never Sandberg's aim. The company wanted to produce a solid, stylish and stylised bass that sounds as good as it looks. In that aim, it has comfortably scored a rock 'n' roll bull's eye.

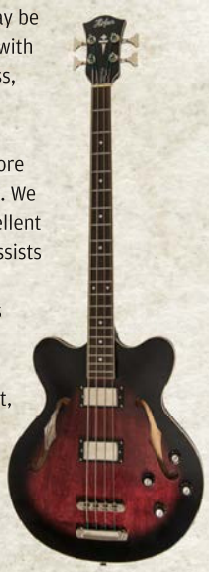
Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Hofner Verythin HCT 500/8 Long Scale

- **PRICE** £659
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins 01691 652449 **www.hofner-guitars.com**

The brand may be synonymous with the Violin Bass, but this is a different and altogether more stable animal. We said: "an excellent choice for bassists whose tastes include 1950s rock 'n' roll, old-school R&B, 60s beat, psychedelia, indie-rock and even early-70s funk."



HIGHLY COMMENDED

B&G Big Sister

- **PRICE** $3,450
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 09
- **CONTACT** B&G Guitars **www.bngguitars.com**

The Little Sister from Israel's B&G Guitars was one of our favourite electric guitars of 2015. This year, the company turned its attention to bass with similarly impressive results. Top-drawer tonewoods, an original, vintage-inspired design and highly musical sounds combine on this exotic slice of luxury.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Orange Crush Bass 50

- **PRICE** £229
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 12
- **CONTACT** 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

2016 saw Orange reinvent its entry-level bass offerings. Whether you are jamming with friends or playing in a function band, modern volume restrictions mean this is as much amp as you'll need for the price of one decent wedding gig. Need more power? Try the 100 (£369).

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Blackstar Bass Fly

- **PRICE** £79
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

Battery-powered bass amps used to be little more than a novelty, with all the low-frequency authority of an angry bluebottle. Not any more: this Fly kicks out a remarkably good tone from a tiny, feather-light package, and the price is democratising too: this amp will create more bassists, and that can only be a good thing.

BEST ACCESSORY

We played a LOT of great pickups this year, three of which make the list. Pickups remain a hugely subjective area, but the Bad Cat Unleash's ability to make a loud amp quieter or a quiet amp louder, all the while preserving tonal quality, really struck a chord...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016 WINNER

Bad Cat Unleash V2

- **PRICE** £449
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 12
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.badcatamps.com**

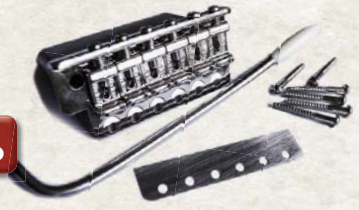
The Unleash V2 wowed *G&B* senior product specialist Huw Price back in the summer – and he's a man who knows a thing or two about attenuation. It's a 100-watt class-D power amp that's smaller than a shoebox and controls your amp's volume without sabotaging the tone. It's lighter and smaller than the competition, very powerful and offers continuously variable attenuation. In short, it's the perfect gigging amp to carry inside the cab of your studio amp.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Tyson Tone Pickups Set-53 Wraptail

- **PRICE** $210
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 28 No 04
- **CONTACT** Tyson Tone Pickups 001 831 776 8692 **www.tysontone.com**

Bob Tyson couldn't find pickups that sounded like vintage P-90s, so he made these incredible mid-50s replicas that hold their own with the genuine article. Bravo, Bob!



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Wudtone CP Vintage Tremolo

- **PRICE** £119
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 11
- **CONTACT** Wudtone 01291 671515 **www.wudtone.com**

This vintage-style vibrato assembly is a beautifully made product that takes the original Fender design to its logical conclusion. It delivers tonal improvements and stability, without making any compromises over aesthetics or tone.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Oil City Pickups Wapping Wharf

- **PRICE** £59
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 09
- **CONTACT** Oil City Pickups 0208 257 0281 **www.oilcitypickups.co.uk**

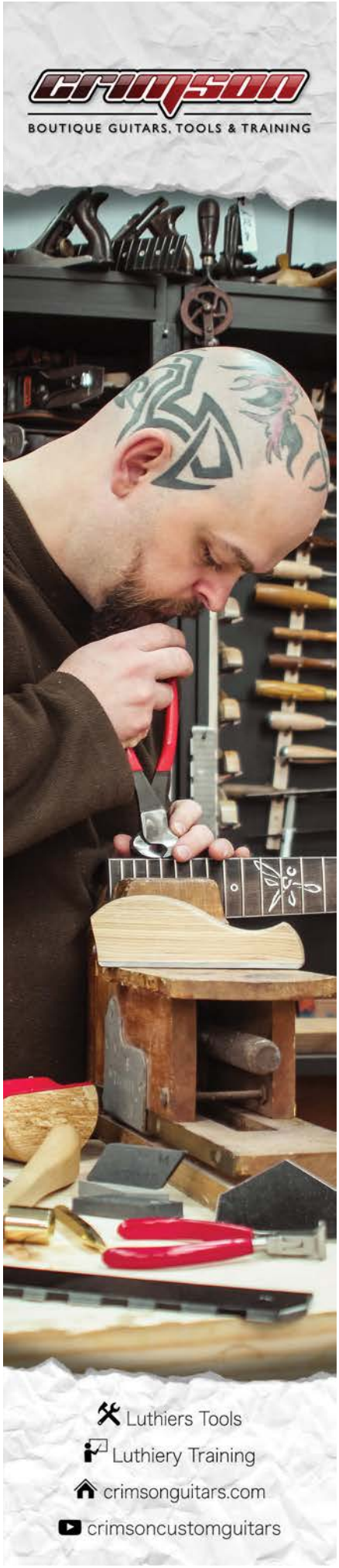
Torn between early- and mid-50s Tele bridge tones? The Oil City Wapping Wharf's tapped coil gives you both at the flick of a switch. Rated at 10K/15K with thin 43AWG wire and A2 and A5 slugs for the plain and wound strings respectively, the range of fat and twangy vintage tones blew us away. It's still in our guitar.

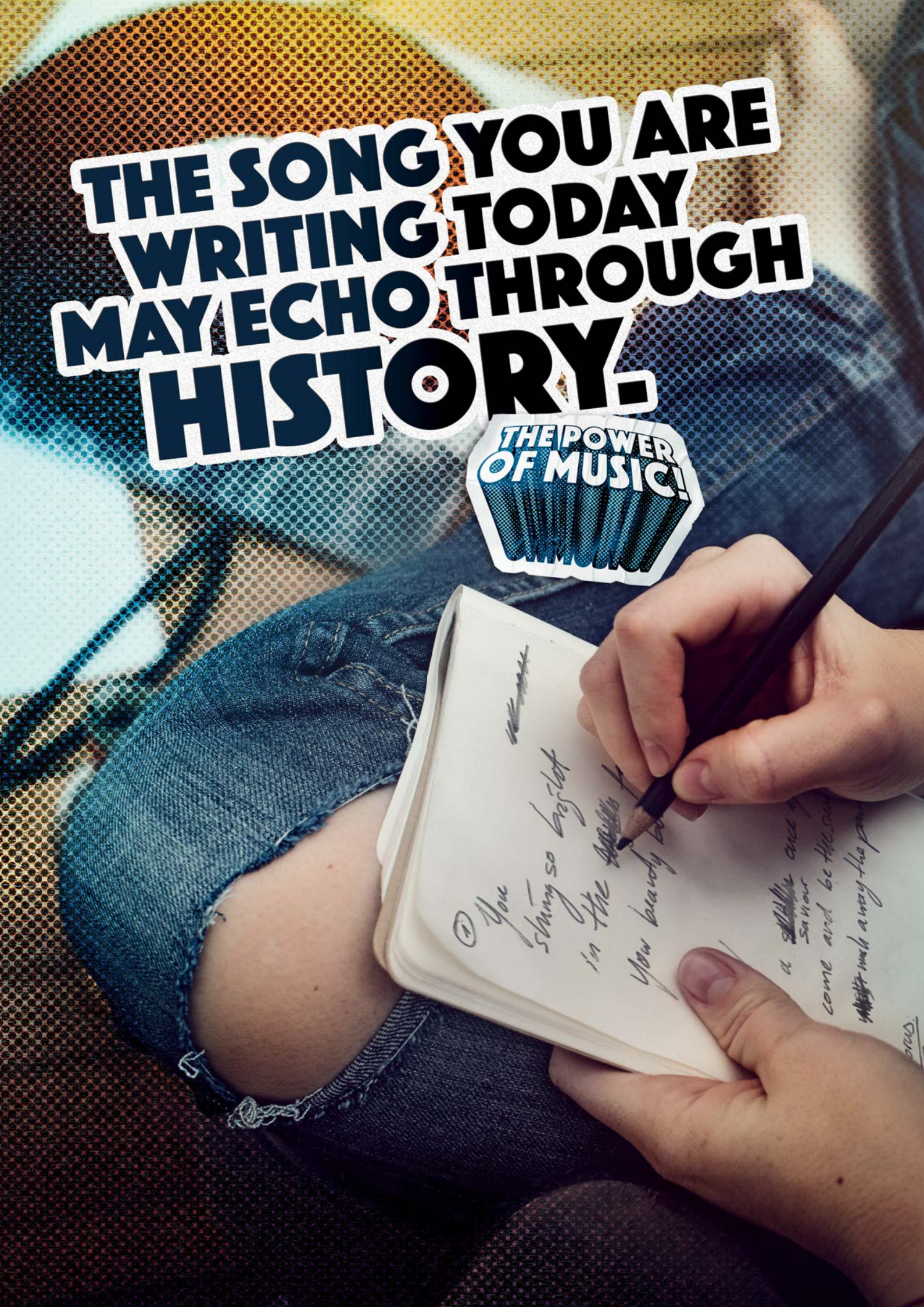
HIGHLY COMMENDED

McNelly Sparkletron

- **PRICE** £94 each or £189 per set
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 08
- **CONTACT** Home Of Tone 07976 972884 **www.mcnellyguitars.com**

The Sparkletron is McNelly's take on vintage-style Filter'Trons, and it's one of the most convincing approximations we've heard. It features wax-potted coils, hand wound with 42AWG wire and alnico 5 magnets, and produces sweet upper-mids with tons of twang and growl and woody cleans. McNelly has nailed that twang thang!

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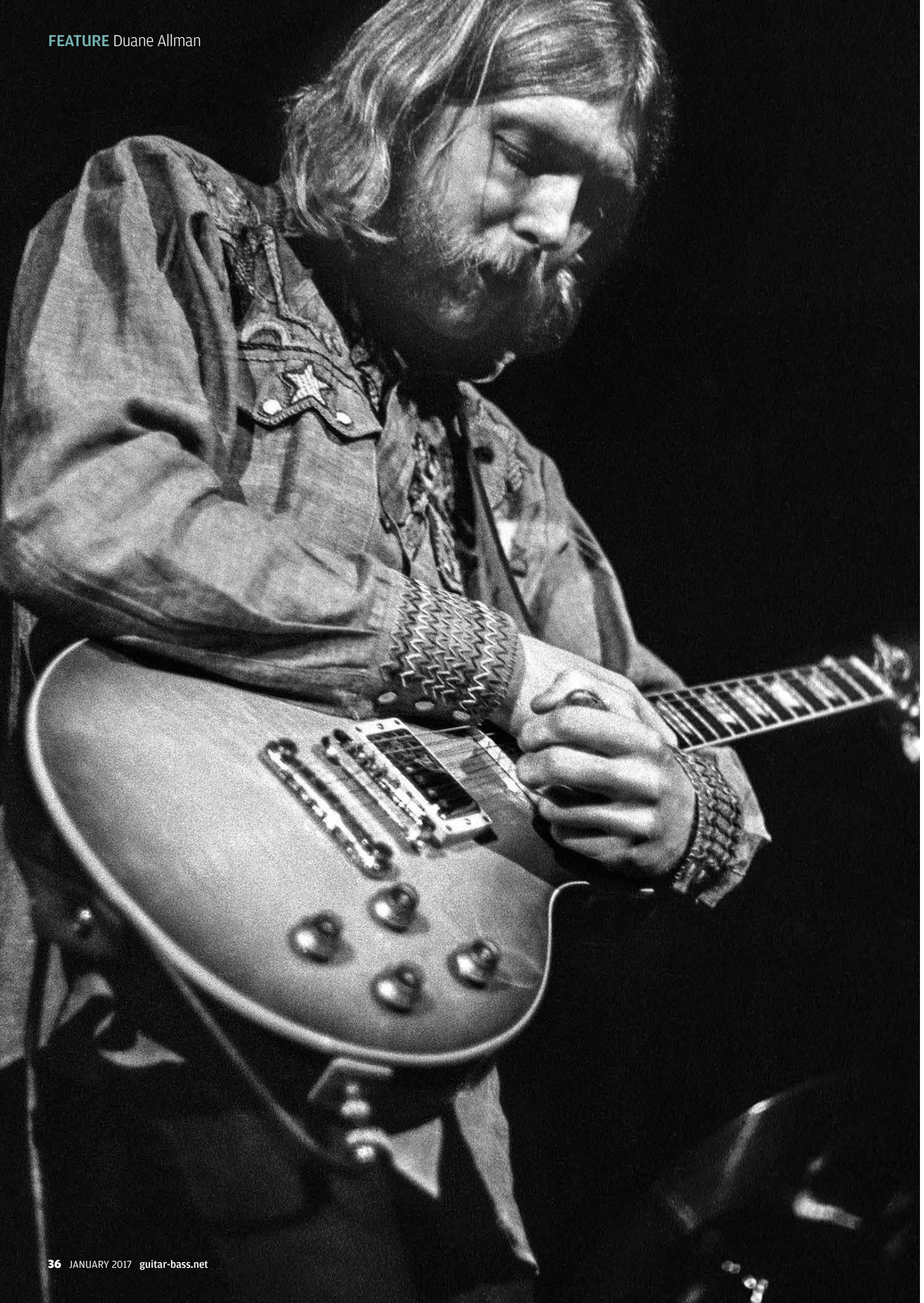


THE *Guitar & Bass* FEATURE

"I hear a confidence that just explodes... He's got his own style, his own personality. It's pretty extraordinary"

Slide supremo. Blues maestro. Jazz improviser. Bandleader and "mothership"... Duane Allman was all those things. *Skydog* boxset producer Bill Levenson and Duane's daughter Galadrielle help guide *G&B* through a dazzling document of guitar genius, now available in 14-album vinyl format...

Story **Michael Stephens** Photography **Paul Alexander Knox**

When any talented artist dies young, it's usual to ask: what might have been? In the case of Duane Allman, who died in 1971 – a year after Jimi Hendrix, yet three years younger – it's been the opposite. If anything, the passing of time has peeled back the multiple layers of what Allman actually achieved in his brief 24 years. By any measure, Allman's recordings for one so young were astounding.

After years of false starts, Allman's recorded legacy came together with the release of the CD boxset *Skydog* in 2013. A critical and commercial success, *Skydog* is back again, this time in appropriate vinyl form. Even at 129 tracks, it's not nearly comprehensive, and for executive producer and lauded rock 'n' roll archivist Bill Levenson, it has been a labour of love.

"There have been other Duane Allman packages, of course," he notes. "The Capricorn two-LP sets which, at the time, seemed massive packages but now seem modest. And the chronology didn't matter so much on those. We've gone back to the first Duane Allman recordings we could find. Chronology is important on *Skydog*."

Levenson was soon joined by Allman's daughter, Galadrielle. For her, the work was bittersweet. Galadrielle Allman never knew her father – Duane died when she was just two – though her detective work was to culminate in her own biography of Duane, *Please Be With Me*. In the Deluxe Edition boxset of Skydog, you get 14 vinyl albums and her book, signed.

"In some ways, Bill and I came separately to the table," she says. "I was the one charged with sourcing the photographs and writing something. But I also had a say in the music in a way that I didn't anticipate. That happened in the home stretch of writing my book, and it really helped. Just to have all the chronological tapes from my dad's life there was a huge gift. It was a more vast well than I originally thought."

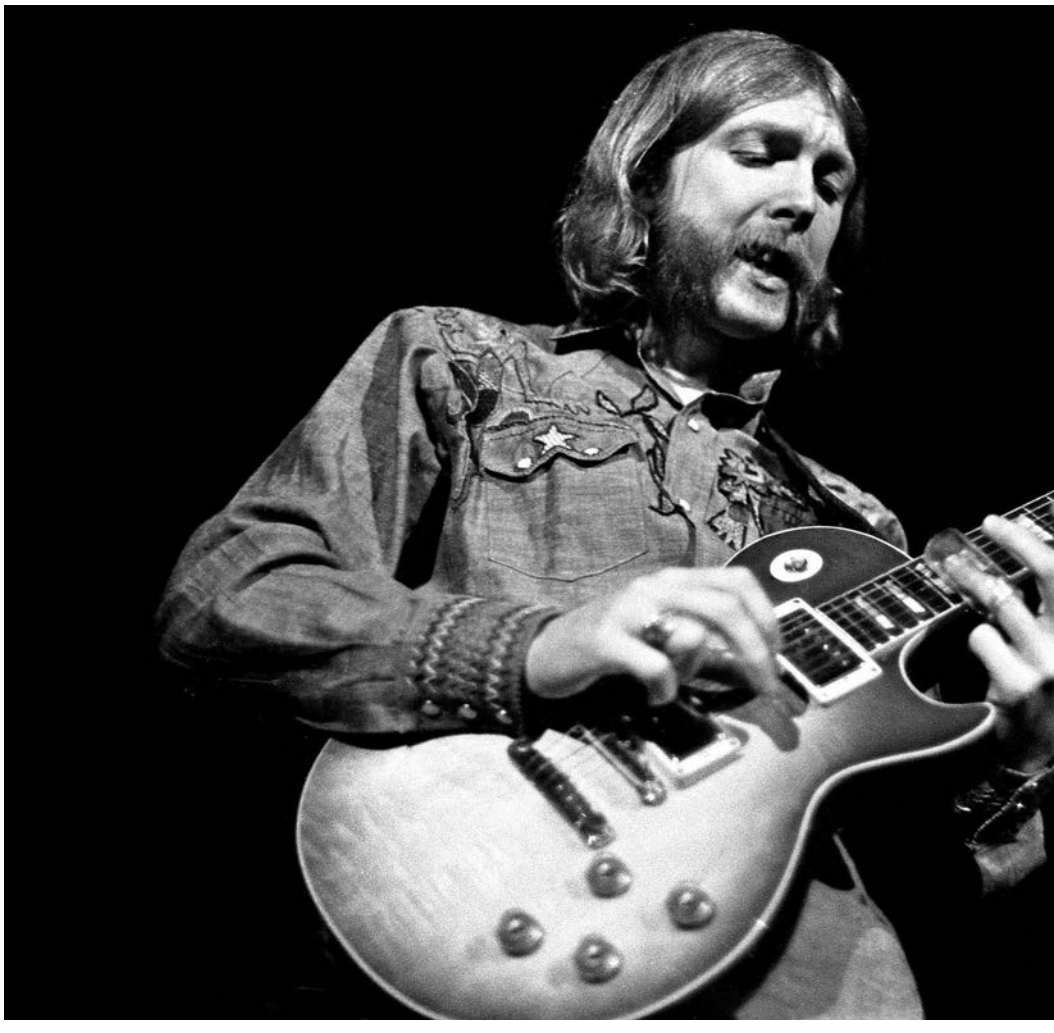
Beyond the Brothers

Skydog works so well because it treats Allman's work outside of The Allman Brothers Band not just as a diversion. The Allman Brothers Band tracks, just 21 of 129, arrive towards the end of the road trip. Before then, there's Duane playing spidery R&B guitar in teen band The Escorts, mimicking The Yardbirds in The Allman Joys, marrying psychedelia and blues in Hour Glass, short-lived band The 31st Of February, plus killer contributions on sessions for Clarence Carter, Wilson Pickett, Laura Lee, King Curtis, Aretha Franklin, John Hammond and more. >

TALKIN' DOG

Allman in the words of those who knew him best...

"Most people have to work their way in. When Duane did that date with Wilson Pickett, he was in. That's never happened before or since, and I don't think it ever will happen again. The players that had been playing lead, we just didn't use them anymore."
Jimmy Johnson, Muscle Shoals guitarist/producer
"Compared to everybody else, Duane seemed like he was from Mars."
David Hood, Muscle Shoals musician/producer
"I LIKE what I'm listening to right now!"
Clarence Carter, during Allman's first recorded slide solo on Carter single *The Road Of Love*
"I quit my staff position in Muscle Shoals because all these people up there kept telling me how rich I was gonna be in a few years from kissing the boss's ass and playing exactly what the boss wants. I told the motherfuckers I was the boss in that department, and would they excuse me but I heard the highway calling."
Duane Allman, in a letter to his cousin Jo Jane
"Duane was smart enough to see what ingredients were missing from both of our previous bands. We didn't have enough of the true, purist blues, and he didn't have enough of the avant-garde, psychedelic approach to the blues. So he tried to put the two sounds together, and that was the first step in finding the sound of The Allman Brothers Band."
Dickey Betts, Allman Brothers guitarist
"The only person who ever intimidated me in my life. If he walked into a room, I became instantly speechless."
Jonny Podell, Allman Brothers' booking agent
"I had never heard anything like Duane Allman and his slide guitar. He played it like a violin or saxophone."
Keyboardist Reese Wynans (early Allman sessions, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Joe Bonamassa)
"He was the greatest guitar player that ever lived."
Scott Freeman, Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist while at the *Macon Telegraph And News*, author of ABB biography *Midnight Riders*
"I said, 'Man, how did you ever get to play that good?'. He said, 'By taking speed every night for three years and playing in rock bands'. I said, 'What?' I don't know if he was kidding or not, but the guy for sure was really a great guitar player."
Blues producer/artist John Hammond
"There were very few people playing electric slide that were doing anything new; it was just the Elmore James licks, and everyone knows those. No one was opening it up until Duane showed up and played in a completely different way."
Eric Clapton
"Rock is like a newspaper for people that can't read. Rock 'n' roll will tell you where everything is at."
Duane Allman



***Skydog* producer Bill Levenson**

There are three self-sung tracks from Duane's incomplete solo album (never released), plus blazing guitar sparring with Otis Rush, The Grateful Dead, Boz Scaggs, Delaney & Bonnie and, of course, Eric Clapton.

Allman's studio sessions are where you get a real perspective on his talent. Other guitar greats, such as Hendrix, Page, Beck, Clapton et al, may be well served by live albums and collections of various jams, but none really had a sideman career quite like Allman's.

And these aren't mere offcuts: they are pro recordings, often at Muscle Shoals, for a slew of great 60s records and artists. Lesser-known cuts are instructive, such as Scaggs' epic *Loan Me A Dime*, with heavy Hammond organ and signature Allman slide guitar to the fore like proto-Allman Brothers...

"That's the right spot," opines Levenson. "The first Allman Brothers album was September '69, the Boz Scaggs tracks were Spring '69, so it's a key time.

"And what you hear is that acceleration! From doing the soul sessions to The Allman Brothers, Duane finds the guitar voice we all know very quickly. I hear a confidence that just explodes. It goes on into 1970, with the Allmans' *Idlewild South* album, the *Layla*... album... by this point, Duane's not 'channelling' anybody, he's got his own style, his own personality. It's pretty extraordinary."

> "What you hear is acceleration! Duane finds the guitar voice we all know very quickly"

Galadrielle Allman, too young to even remember herself, adds: "It's easy to forget how young he was, how quickly all of this happened. Between his first recordings and the last, it's an incredible world of growth.

"He really dipped into every genre of American music by the time he was 20, which I think is quite remarkable. In that way, he wasn't just a rock player. It's hard to imagine now that just being in this small, regional recording studio in Alabama brought him into contact and playing with everyone from Aretha Franklin to Boz Scaggs. It's like he went up the crossroads!"

Speaking to Allman aficionados, this is a recurring theme. Not just that Duane was good, but he was good very quickly.

"People talk about a career progression over years these days," smiles Levenson.

Duane onstage with The Allman Brothers Band in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in the spring of 1971

"Here, you're talking about six, nine months? I can't think of any other artist who invents, reinvents, a guitar style in that short period of time. It's quite extraordinary.

"Maybe the only other guy was Hendrix. You don't see that kind of phenomenon anymore, I agree. You look at Hendrix, 1965 to '66 to '67, and you see it happen. You could probably do so with Jimmy Page, from The Yardbirds into Led Zeppelin. I think you can hear it with Eric Clapton, from John Mayall's Bluesbreakers to *Fresh Cream* to Disraeli Gears. The Beatles and George Harrison, too, of course. And again, you're talking months, not years. Quantum jumps in such a short timeframe."

At the risk of actually saying, "Things ain't what they used to be...", it's noticeable that all the guitarists Levenson cites, including Allman, flourished between the mid-60s and 1970. Does Levenson have theories as to why?

"I don't know," he admits. "I don't want to be flippant and say it was drugs, because I don't think it was. I just think the music of that time, mid/late-60s, was just so fresh. There were no rules. Everyone was making it up as they went. It's much harder these days, when there's an awful lot of people behind you who've already established guidelines, tones, 'rules', whatever..."

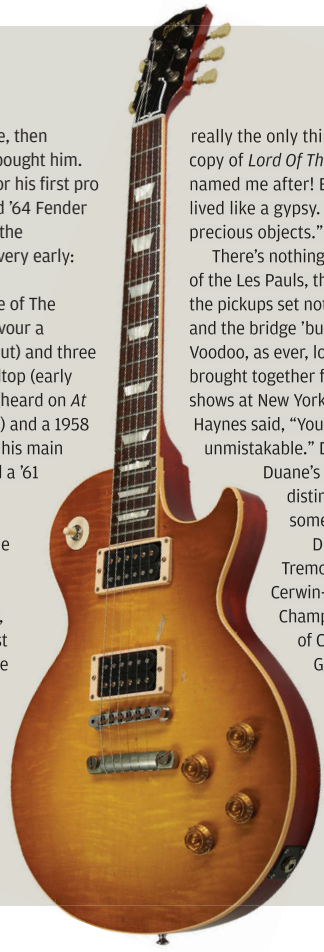
In researching the biography of her father – who split from her mother early on – Galadrielle soon found that everyone close to Duane talked of an incredible work ethic. "The only way he could have had that kind of output is because he never stopped. While the other guys were resting, he was out there jumping from one thing to the next. Some people may have painted him as some sort of lackadaisical hippy, but that so was not the case. He was a hard-working prodigy, truly."

Skydog: best in show?

With so many tracks, *Skydog* isn't going to be for everyone: "There are some choices in here that are for completists, no question," admits Levenson. And to feature as much of Duane's story as possible, the producer even committed to some tracks without previously hearing them, "Because we believed they'd progress the storyline." An example is Allman's three 1968 tracks with The Bleus [sic], despite the name a shortlived psych/beatpop group, aside from a few tasty Duane fills and one nice slide solo. "They're not as Duane Allman-centric as we'd like," says Levenson, "but they filled a niche and help tell the story. With 130 tracks, not every one is gonna be a stone-cold classic."

That said, most of these sessions are superb, and not just the barnstormers such as Wilson Pickett's *Hey Jude*. "The Delaney >

DUANE'S GEAR



Duane started playing on a Silvertone, then a Gibson Les Paul Junior his mother bought him. He went through many guitars, but for his first pro sessions he mostly played '54, '61 and '64 Fender Strats. There's not much evidence of the '54 being played extensively, but it's very early: the serial number was #0019.

There was overlap, but by the time of The Allman Brothers, Duane tended to favour a dot-neck Gibson ES-335 (Allmans debut) and three Gibson Les Pauls – his famed '57 Goldtop (early ABB albums), a '59 Cherry Sunburst (heard on *At Fillmore East*, Gibson replica pictured) and a 1958 or '59 'Darkburst' (bought in '71, and his main guitar until his death). He also played a '61 Gibson Les Paul/SG (given to him by Dickey Betts), notably on *Statesboro Blues*. The Goldtop is on display at The Allmans museum, The Big House, in Macon, Georgia; the two later Bursts have appeared at various exhibitions, donated by Galadrielle. The Darkburst Les Paul is currently at the Experience Music Project museum in Seattle, Duane's daughter saying: "It sits between a guitar of Jimi Hendrix's and one of Eric Clapton's. I like that. To me, that feels where he belongs. And that's the most beautiful guitar."

"They're so precious to me," Galadrielle adds. "Because they're really the only things of his I have. I mean, I have his copy of *Lord Of The Rings* – the Tolkien trilogy that he named me after! But just that and other little things. He lived like a gypsy. These guitars were by far his most precious objects."

There's nothing particularly 'customised' about any of the Les Pauls, though the Cherry Sunburst does have the pickups set noticeably low (with polepieces raised), and the bridge 'bucker is unusually weaker than the neck. Voodoo, as ever, looms large! When the three LPs were brought together for The Allman Brothers' farewell live shows at New York City's Beacon Theatre in 2014, Warren Haynes said, "You plug them in and the sound of Duane is unmistakable." Derek Trucks, who played slide on Duane's Goldtop, noted, "The sound is so distinct and powerful. There was definitely some extra spirit in the room."

Duane favoured a Marshall 50W 1987 Tremolo head through 4x12 cabs (with Cerwin-Vega speakers) and, notably, a Fender Champ combo (*Layla...*), probably the property of Criteria Studios. His acoustics were a 30s Gibson L-00, a Gibson Heritage and a Dove. He also used a wooden-bodied blonde 30s Dobro (on *Layla...*), two 30s steel-body National Duolians – Gregg Allman later gave one to Eric Clapton and one to Ronnie Wood. Allman famously used a medicine bottle as a slide. He liked Vox fuzz and Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face pedals – in the latter, he insisted on 9V carbon-zinc.

LAYLA AND OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS: THE GOD 'N' DOG SHOW

Even if you know little of Duane Allman, you'll surely know his role on Eric Clapton's Derek And The Dominos album, *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs*. It's still acclaimed as a tour de force, and Allman's input was absolutely pivotal – writing the circular *Layla* riff, for starters...

Clapton and his band had booked into Florida's Criteria Studios, where the Allmans were recording, in 1970, and it seemed destined they would collaborate. Clapton had been bowled over by Duane's playing on Aretha Franklin's version of The Band's *The Weight*: "It was one of the few times in my life where I had to know who that was – now!" EC recalled.

Producer-of-both Tom Dowd was the common link. Dowd took an eager EC to see Duane and the Allmans live. After meeting, Duane asked Eric if he could watch the Dominos record, but Clapton soon wanted Duane to play.

"After the concert was over, they all came back to the studio and jammed until, like, six the next night," Dowd later remembered. "They were trading licks. They were swapping guitars. They were talking shop and information and having a ball, no holds barred... we turned the tapes on and they went on for 15 to 18 hours like that... it was a wonderful experience."

At the time, Duane said, Eric "wrote the book, man – the Contemporary White Blues Guitar, Volume 1. His style and technique is what's really amazing. He's got a lot to say, and the way he says it just knocks me out." Five Derek and The Dominos tracks are on *Skydog*, and *Layla...* remains possibly the only Clapton album where the Englishman is outshone throughout.

As Duane himself recalled: "I was just going to play on one or two, and then as we kept on going, it kept developing. Incidentally, on sides 1, 2, 3 and 4, all the songs are right in the order they were cut from the first day through to *Layla* and then *Thorn Tree*. I'm as proud of that as any albums that I've ever been on. I'm as satisfied with my work on that as I could possibly be."

Galadrielle Allman: "He was really proud of his work with Clapton, of course, we all knew that. And the fact my dad played with Eric Clapton expanded his fanbase immeasurably, that's just how it is."

Even so, Duane Allman actually turned down Clapton's request that he join the Dominos full-time after cutting the *Layla...* album. "There's his letter to my mother in the book, where he explains, and he even tells her the terms of any agreement," explains Galadrielle. "But he even hushes my mum, at the end in his writing. It was a big risk for him even to put it down on paper, I guess.

"That he turned down Clapton was a real powerful statement of how much he believed in The Allman Brothers, how much he wanted to be his own person. He knew that he would always be a 'Clapton band-member' if he was, of course, in Clapton's band, you know? It was never going to be his band, per se.

"And I can see that. The Allman Brothers Band were doing things so innovative that he wanted to pursue, just had to pursue. It was a different set of influences. But I can hear the influence on latter-day Allman Brothers on the *Layla* album. He certainly adds his own voice to it, and I'm not sure he quite gets his due, there..."

Allman only played onstage with the Dominos twice, on their 1970 US tour, but Clapton nevertheless described Duane as the "musical brother I'd never had but wished I did."

& Bonnie outtake of *Gift Of Love*, I found it unbelievable that was unissued," Levenson says. "There was another version released, but not this one. *Gift Of Love* was actually going to be the title of the *Skydog* boxset for a while.

"Another one is Delaney & Bonnie & Friends... the *Poor Elijah/Tribute To Johnson* medley, the live track, is incredible. Not just Duane, but everyone included. That captures a moment in time, where people just collaborate on the spot and come up with something amazing."

And the Allmans are, of course, well represented. Both Levenson and Galadrielle Allman point to a live version of *You Don't Love Me*, which segues into King Curtis's *Soul Serenade*, recorded just weeks after Duane had attended the funeral of the jazz saxophonist and mentor. "They were really good friends and my dad learned so much from him," says Galadrielle, "he couldn't say enough about what he learned from Curtis about improvising."

"Curtis would have been on Duane's mind," concurs Levenson, "and to be able to step in front of an audience and pull out *Soul Serenade* like that... incredible."

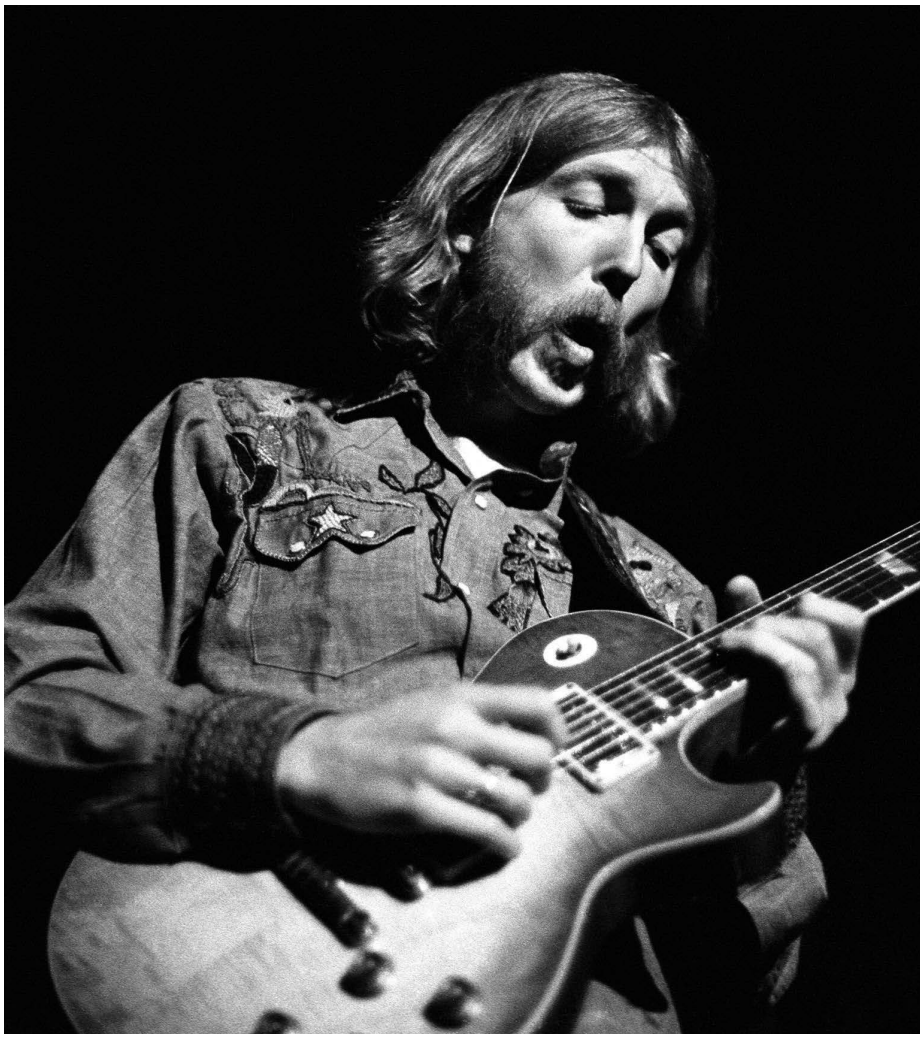
If nothing else, *Skydog* lays to rest the notion that Duane Allman was 'just' a Southern rock slide player. Brother Gregg Allman has often argued the tag is daft anyway, as most of the Allmans' heroes – Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry – were Southern anyway. "Saying 'Southern rock' is like sayin' 'rock rock'!" Gregg once jibed.

"When I was a teenager, I was listening to punk!" laughs Galadrielle, who grew up in California, "but when I was in college in New York I would hear Allman Brothers music out of dorm windows of 20-year-olds. Part of me believes that The Allman Brothers are identified with the South in such a regional way, it actually does them a disservice."

That much is true. It's all music. And as *Skydog* attests, all music is something that Duane Allman made his life's mission – no matter how brief that life was.

As Duane himself said in a rare interview for a promo album called *Duane Allman Dialogs*: "There's a lot of different forms of communication, but music is absolutely the purest one, man. You can't hurt anybody with music. You can maybe offend somebody with songs and words, but you can't offend anybody with music – it's all just good.

"There's nothing at all that could ever be bad about music, about playing it. It's a wonderful thing, a grace."



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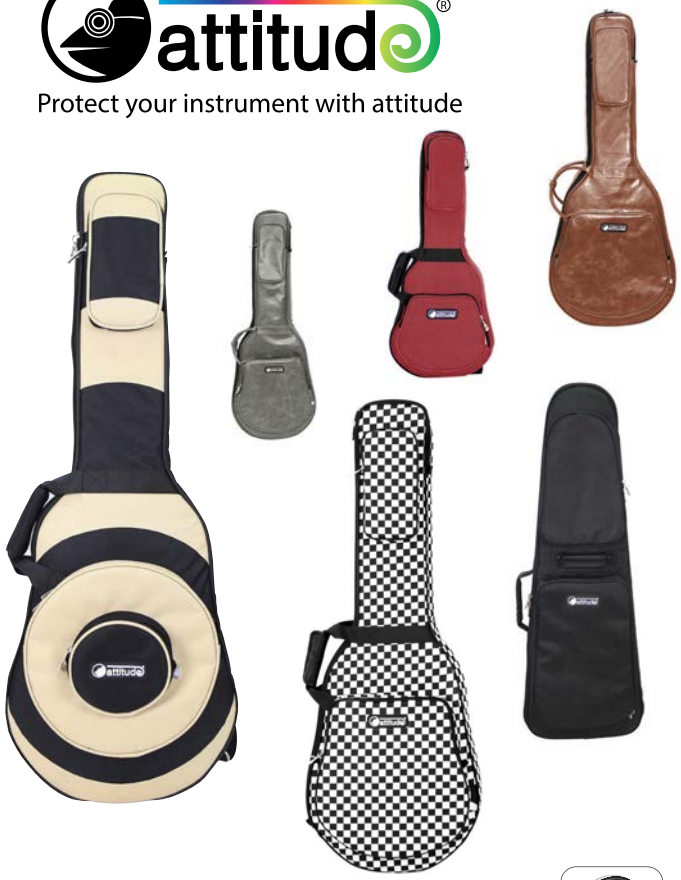

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Folk hero

From being a bolshy teenager in the 1960s British folk scene, Martin Simpson has gone on to become an enigmatic virtuoso, earning a startling 26 BBC Folk Award nominations. *G&B* hears how he did it

Story **David Gallant** Portraits **Elly Lucas**

"I must have been about three or four when I first heard Paul Robeson singing *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child* on a 78," says fingerstyle maestro and folk songwriter extraordinaire Martin Simpson. "I didn't understand what was going on, but I absolutely loved it."

Simpson's family were very involved in music. "Father was a singer – a baritone and a lead performer in amateur dramatics, and my mother was very fond of listening to music. She was the one who would be listening to Paul Robeson and Harry Belafonte. At the same time – we're talking about 1956-57 – my eldest brother, who's 12 years older than me, was buying a lot of rock 'n' roll 78s, and I really liked Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis and things like that.

"Then in school, when I suppose I was about eight or nine, I had another one of those kind of revelations, where our music teacher, who was a thoroughly unpleasant human being – bless her heart – taught the class *Barbara Allen* and I completely fell in love with it. I think it was the first time I was ever aware of the ballad tradition. Again, it was that thing where there was a massive emotional connection to the song, and I remember asking whether I could have my Roneo copy – a smelly old purple thing – to take home. You know, this sense of a song moving me was a big thing early on. I remember in *Look and Learn* magazine in the early 60s, they published *The Ballad Of John Henry*, and that was another thing that just made me think, 'Wow, that's amazing. I'll be having some of this'."

The first record Simpson bought was an EP of *Coppélia*... "Mad shit! I wanted to be a ballet dancer. But, without lessons, I singularly failed. It was Scunthorpe, you know? I couldn't find anybody to teach me and I didn't have any disposable income.

"I remember buying a Shadows EP at one point, 'cos I'd already completely fallen in love with the guitar. But I have to say that I always considered the electric guitar to be a rather inferior instrument. It really didn't speak to me, although I could see why it was interesting. Then, the next really important thing was my middle brother buying blues records. Big Bill Broonzy live in Sweden was an absolute head fuck for me. I could not believe it.

"Then shortly after that, there was this big folk thing happening in America – Peter, Paul and Mary, and Bob Dylan. The thing for me was the songs and the stories – I was really into that. And, of course, I'd fallen in love with the sound of the guitar, and I remember having a Kingston Trio record. I studied the picture on the cover of that LP for ages, looking at these three guys with their instruments – the guy with the Martin D-28 and the guy with the little tenor guitar... but that tenor was never in contention as far

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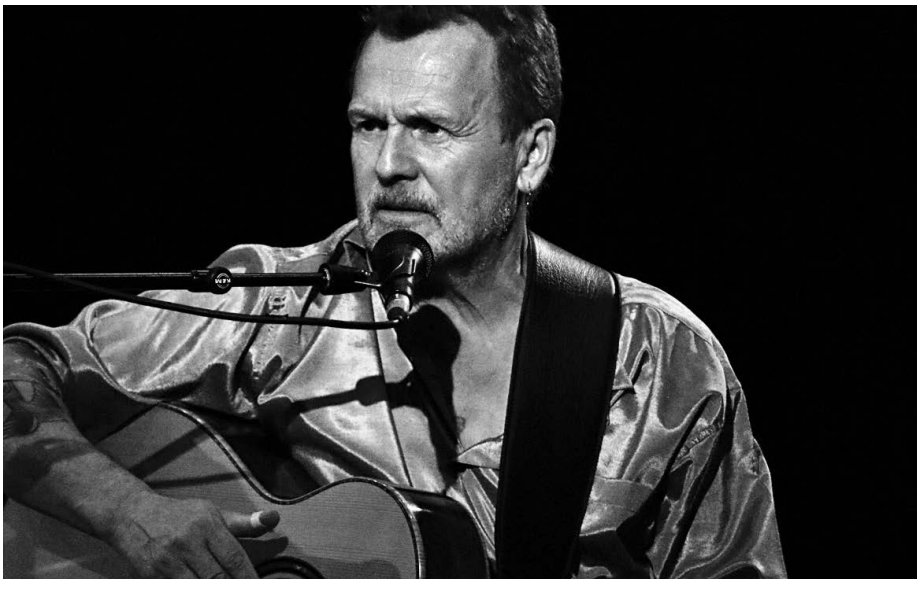

"People say to me, 'Obviously you were massively gifted', but I don't think I was. I just worked like a maniac and was very bolshy"

as I was concerned. That didn't seem like a sensible thing. But the guy with the Vega Pete Seeger Long Neck banjo, on the other hand, was very tempting. I used to listen to the record and look at that picture and think, 'Which one of these instruments should I be playing?'. I decided that I wanted to get a guitar, partly I suppose because they were more available. So I actually started begging for guitars when I was about 10. And it was serially refused! It was 1963 and The Beatles were coming up, and in a sense it was a fad – and a rather ugly fad at that. So, basically, my dad had no money and no interest whatsoever in my being a Beatle – I think it's hilarious in hindsight. But eventually, when I was 12, my uncle and my eldest brother clubbed together and got me a guitar for Christmas." Simpson continues: "It was a little Antoria classical from John's bargain shop in Scunthorpe, and it was £8. I spent Christmas afternoon playing *The Last Post* on open strings until I was told to shut up, 'cos the old lady next door had died and any more Christmas *Last Post* would have got me killed. It was almost the end of my career before I got started!"

Surprisingly, Simpson reads neither music nor tablature: "I never had any interest whatsoever in either of those things. I had things like the Joan Baez songbook, and I would look at the chords and wail through songs just by playing the chords and trying to fingerpick – it was a really steep learning curve. People say to me, 'Well, obviously you were massively gifted'. But I don't think I was particularly gifted, I just worked like a maniac to get my fingers moving, and I was very bolshy, so I would never learn things exactly.

"Maybe I was a bit lazy, too, but I just wanted to do things the way I wanted to do it. It was an interesting time, 'cos all of a sudden in the mid-60s there was this deluge of reissues of Blues 78s, with discoveries of people like Mississippi John Hurt. He was so important to me and so was Broonzy. One of the things that I got from Broonzy on this live record was all the chat while he was tuning the guitar... and he would move a string and do some absolutely jaw-dropping run. And I said to myself, 'I'm going to do that when I grow up'. And I do! I try and make tuning a musical part of what I do."

Simpson bought his first banjo when he was 13. "It was a Windsor Monarch >

Supreme made in Birmingham, a very fine banjo," he recalls. "It came from John's – again. £15 with two strings missing, and I knocked them down to £13! I sold it to a guy years later because I was trading up, and now if I play in Alwnick in Northumberland, he brings the banjo to visit me – which is very sweet. A year later, I bought my first steel-string guitar, a Harmony Sovereign."

Simpson recalls how that came about. "I was given the choice of going on a school trip to Spain or using the money for something else. My parents had put some money aside for me, and I think when I was 14 it matured. I got the Sovereign from Paul's music shop in Dunstall Street, Scunthorpe. It was £38, so I did a part-exchange and traded in my Antoria."

This is my church

Around this time, Simpson started going to Scunthorpe folk club. "It was one of the big folk clubs in the country when the folk scene of the 60s was really happening," he says. "Everyone who was on it would come to the big clubs. So I saw Stefan Grossman there when I was 15, Martin Carthy, Nick Jones, incredible musicians – it was like watching Jimi Hendrix from three feet away.

"Ralph McTell was incredibly supportive. You'd go up to him and say, 'Wow, where did you get that?', and he'd give you a list of people to listen to... go and get a Blind Blake record, go and get this, go and get that. I remember getting into a long conversation with Peter Bellamy about Robert Johnson – fantastic. It was an incredible place to be involved in. It was my absolute church. I was there all the time, watching everybody play, so I got hold of all these alternative tunings. Hearing slide guitar for the first time... Blind Willie Johnson and people like that. That got me into open D and G tunings on the guitar.

"Then having the banjo and hearing recordings of people like Tom Paley, the fact that the five-string banjo is pragmatically retuned, for instance... one of the really common alternate tunings on the five-string banjo is Gsus4 – absolutely parallel to DADGAD. I was immediately off into this other realm where you could retune the banjo however you wanted, and I realised it was just the same as the guitar. That was me done!"

By now, Simpson had already upgraded from his Harmony Sovereign: "I had a Gibson J-45 for a while before I took it down to Ivor Mairants and traded it in for an 000-18, which was the most affordable Martin. I didn't really get on with dreadnoughts because they're too big... they're just awkward things. The 000-18 was great."

During his mid-to-late teens, Simpson soaked up as much music as he could, going to gigs such as the Lippmann Rau Blues Package at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1968. "On this particular occasion, I went with a bunch of mates. T-Bone Walker was on the bill, along with John Lee Hooker, Big Joe Williams – you know, it was absolutely mind-boggling. I went through that gig and at the end all my friends were leaving, and they said: 'where's Simpson gone?'. I was backstage hanging out with Big Joe Williams! I saw one of those guys recently and we couldn't get our heads around how you could do that. But that's who I was. I was off. I was completely driven. People were really, really, really hilariously rude to me in hindsight."

By the early 70s, Simpson was already a seasoned performer: "In 1974, after a gig in Algeria – yes, really, Algeria! I had everything I owned stolen on the way back, including the 000-18. After that, I decided that I would have a guitar made. So, later that same year I had my first guitar made by Peter Abnett, a luthier from Kent. He was one of the guys, along with another luthier, Stefan Sobell, who came up with the whole flat-back bouzouki thing. Lovely guys and great builders."

Simpson's big break came in 1976 at a folk club in Lancashire. "Bill Leader came to the club, and Bill had recorded Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, the Watersons..." he says. "I mean his CV when it came to recording was absolutely ridiculous. So important. And he had recently formed a record label – it was the first place that Nic Jones recorded. And he came over to see me and said, 'That's great, we'd like to make a record with you'. That was a massive time for me because when the record came out, I went from being almost invisible to suddenly having full-page interviews in the *Melody Maker*. I went on tour supporting Steeleye Span at the end of '76 – 28 gigs on the trot... two nights at the Hammersmith Odeon, all that kind of thing. The following year, I did some recording with Steeleye's Rick Kemp – a great bass player.

"I also got a call from June Tabor's manager to say that June wanted to do a tour and Nic Jones wasn't interested in playing the guitar on it, because he wants to do what he does... and the only other person they could think of that could do it was me. I almost fainted. I was only 24. It was such a great thing to go out and learn to accompany one of the greatest singers on the planet. It was one of the best things that ever happened to me. The learning curve involved in that was astonishing. Open tunings, fingerpicking, slide playing – and very vocal. Wonderful!"

40 years on, and Simpson's playing Sobell's instruments: "They're ferocious!", while his latest musical offering is another collaboration: *Mr Martin Simpson & Mr Dom Flemons Proudly Present A Selection Of Ever Popular Favourites*. A dazzling display of acoustic artistry on both banjo and guitar.

> "When the record came out, I went from being almost invisible to suddenly having full-page interviews in the *Melody Maker*"

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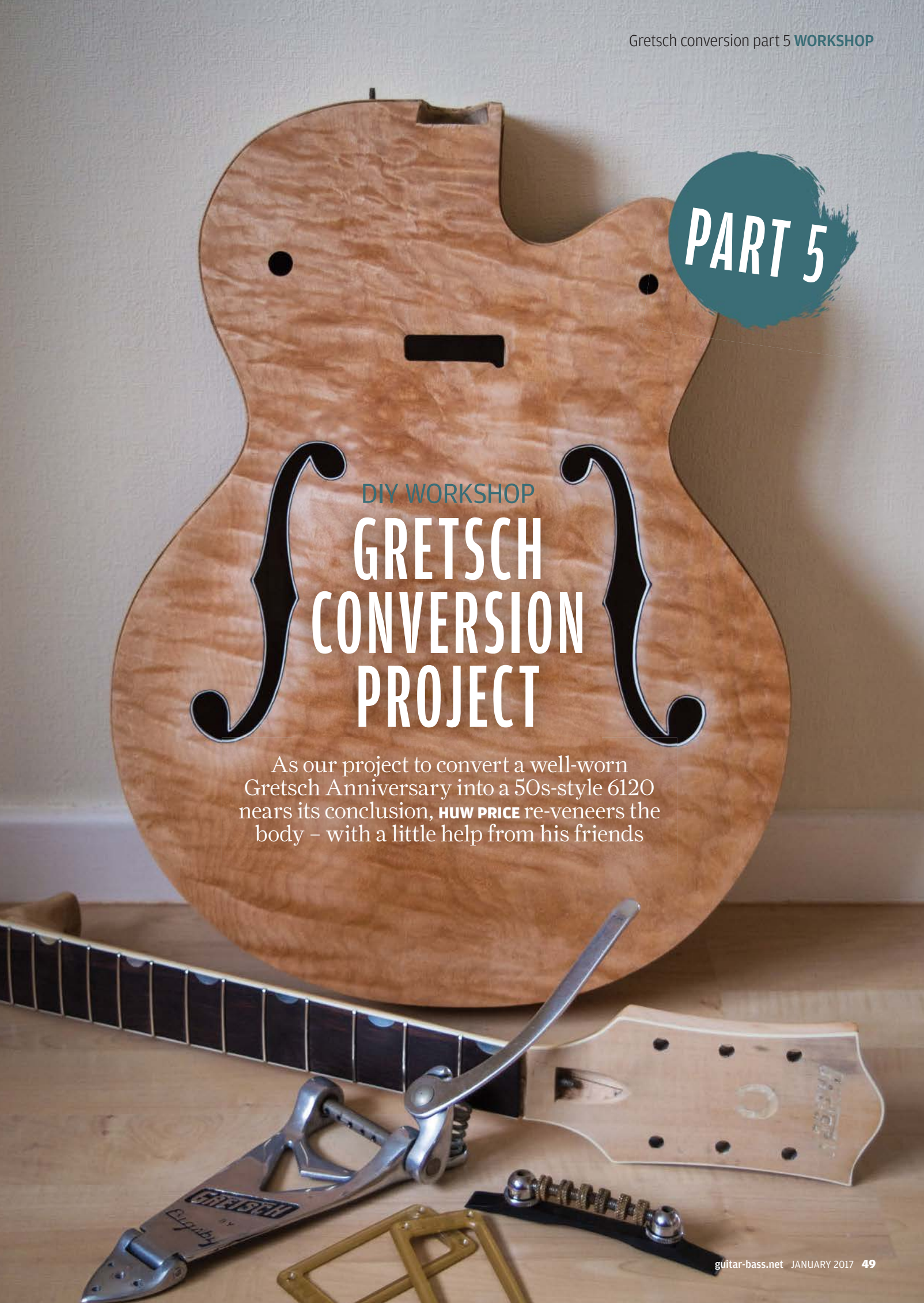


PART 5

DIY WORKSHOP

GRETSCH CONVERSION PROJECT

As our project to convert a well-worn Gretsch Anniversary into a 50s-style 6120 nears its conclusion, **HUW PRICE** re-veneers the body – with a little help from his friends

1 With a roll of veneer big enough for four tops, this cut-out is used to select the area of figuring we like best

There are times in our lives when we need professional help. Fortunately, my friend Patrick Alexander is a professional and he offered to re-veneer the top for me. He owns a bag press and a vacuum pump, but I had to source the veneer myself and I wanted to emulate the quilted figuring of John Entwistle's famous 6120 and the example featured in Stuart Walmsley's Private Collection in these pages back in 2011.

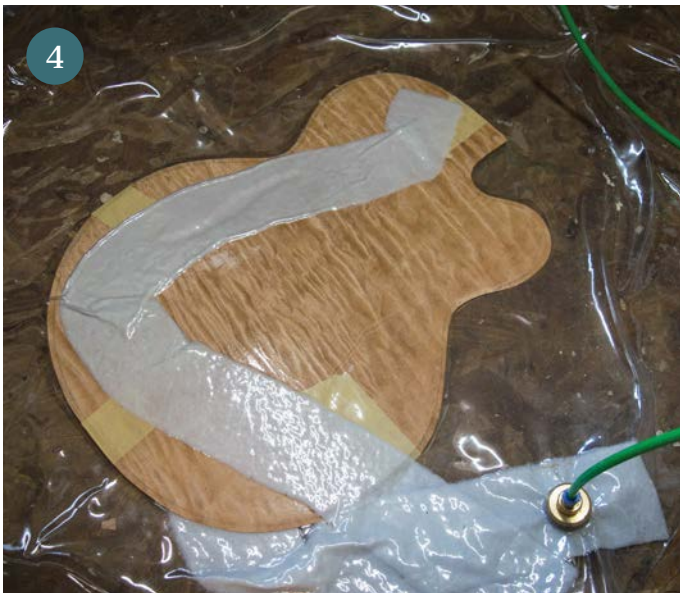
The decision to re-veneer wasn't taken for aesthetic reasons alone. The top had lost thickness from having twice been stripped and was covered in scratches, so I probably would have sanded through the surface layer if I'd tried to get rid of them. Acquiring quilted maple wide enough to cover a 16-inch body proved problematic. After trying and failing at every luthier supplier and veneer specialist in the UK, I found a company based in the Republic Of Ireland called Maru Wood Veneers (www.marurestoration.ie). They emailed sample photos of some suitable sheets, I chose the one I wanted and the veneer they sent was enough to do four tops.

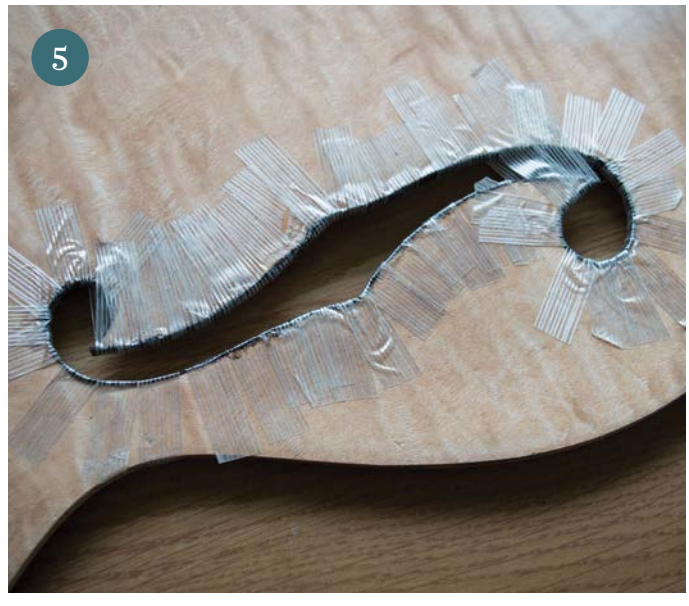
I cut out a body template and moved it over the veneer in order to select the area I liked best (1). Patrick placed the top over the chosen area, drew the shape onto the veneer with a pencil and cut the veneer with a very sharp knife, leaving an overhang of around 1cm all around the edge.

Some sources suggest hide glue would originally have been used to create the laminated top, but that seems implausible because Gretsch bodies don't de-laminate as a result of steaming off necks. That rules out hide glue and aliphatic resin glues such as Titebond – both of which will 'let go' if you give them enough steam.

Patrick recommended urea formaldehyde glue (Cascamite) because it sets crystal-hard and cannot be dismantled, plus it has a much longer open time than some other glues. The key to success was to ensure a very even coverage, so Patrick used a specialist glue roller tool to apply the Cascamite to the veneer's rear surface (2). The top was flipped over, positioned onto the veneer and held loosely in position with veneering tape (3).

The top was quickly placed inside the press, sealed up and the pump





formed the vacuum. There was no danger of the top being crushed because a bag press provides even pressure front and back – about 14lbs per square inch.

The overhang allows for the veneer being drawn in, as it conforms to the top's curve. However, if it's too great, it can cause bulging up at the edges. It was a pretty thrilling experience to watch the veneer taking shape, but it was eight hours before the top could be removed from the press 4.

Trimming the top

Thanks to Patrick's expertise, the veneering couldn't have gone any better and there were no cracks or bumps to deal with. The top was noticeably heavier and stiffer, with a brighter and clearer tap tone replacing the previously spongy and lifeless thud. Trimming the edges had to be done carefully because I didn't want to remove any material from the original top.

The method I settled on was to score most of the way through the veneer with a very sharp blade from the back while holding the top firmly against a wooden board. I cut about 2mm outside the edge then snapped off the veneer by pressing from the front. A file was used to shave the veneer even closer to the edge, then I trued everything up with a sanding block.

For the f-holes and pickup hole, I held the top up against a window so I could see light through them, and I traced the outlines onto the front with a pencil. This time, I scored the veneer from the front and pushed the veneer through, then filed and sanded as before. With all of the excess veneer removed, the top's tap tone was further improved with a clearer and more distinct ping. The re-veneer had caused the edges of the upper bout to curl upwards slightly, but they pressed flat easily enough. Where the warped f-hole points had previously pointed into the body, they were now flush with the top arch.

I also noticed how flimsy they were and realised it would take little effort to snap them. Clearly, the binding adds sufficient reinforcement, so Gretsch may well have left the points wider and squarer on unbound f-holes because the potential weakness was understood. Gretsch tops from >

2 This specialised roller ensures that the Cascamite glue spreads as evenly as possible

3 This low-tack veneer tape holds everything in position as the top is placed into the bag press and the air is extracted

4 It's suck it and see time as the top sits for eight hours in the bag press

5 The f-hole binding is attached with acrylic cement glue and held with binding tape from Rothko & Frost

6 After 24 hours, the binding tape is removed to reveal a horrendous-looking mess

7 After much scraping, the binding is finished and – although not up to Terada standards – it looks vintage-correct

this era were three-ply, and therefore a lot thinner than those made by Gibson and others.

Binding begins

The tedious task of binding the f-holes has to be completed before reassembling the body. Rothko & Frost supplied the ABS plastic binding – a black strip 0.5mm wide and a white strip 0.5mm wide. The ivory white I had used elsewhere wasn't an option, so the plan is to stain the white later.

The f-holes present some fairly tight curves, but such thin strips are easy enough to bend without heat treatment. Since I had never done any f-hole binding before, I did it in two stages – moving onto the white only when the black layer was complete **5**.

This time, I used some IPS Weld-On 16 Acrylic Plastic Cement from Small Wonder Music and some binding tape from Rothko & Frost. Previously, I have used masking tape, but the specialist stuff grips better and it doesn't tear.

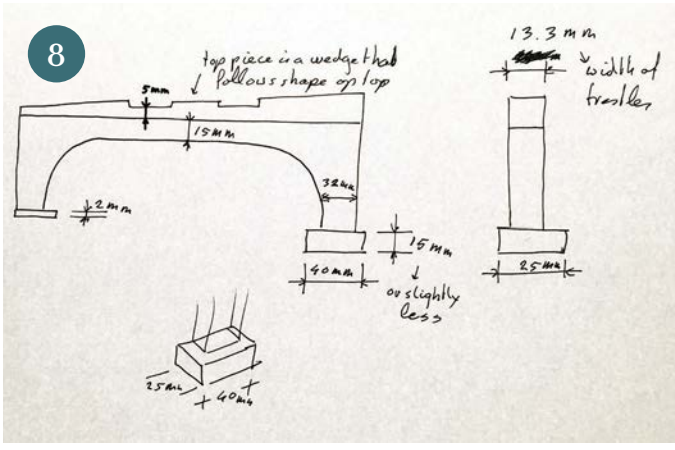
When doing binding work, it's advisable to cut and line up as many strips of tape as you could need, because you have to work quickly and preparation speeds up the process. The glue took 24 hours to set and Stanley blades and sandpaper were used to bring the binding flush with the top **6** & **7**.

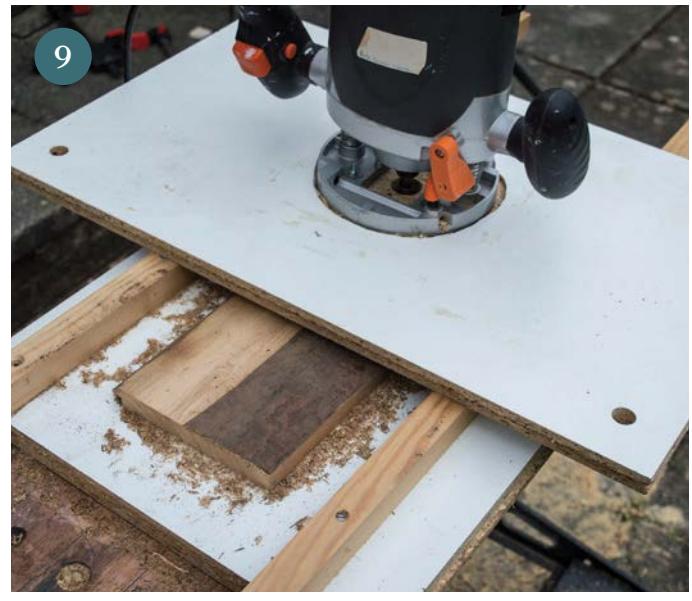
Trestle bracing

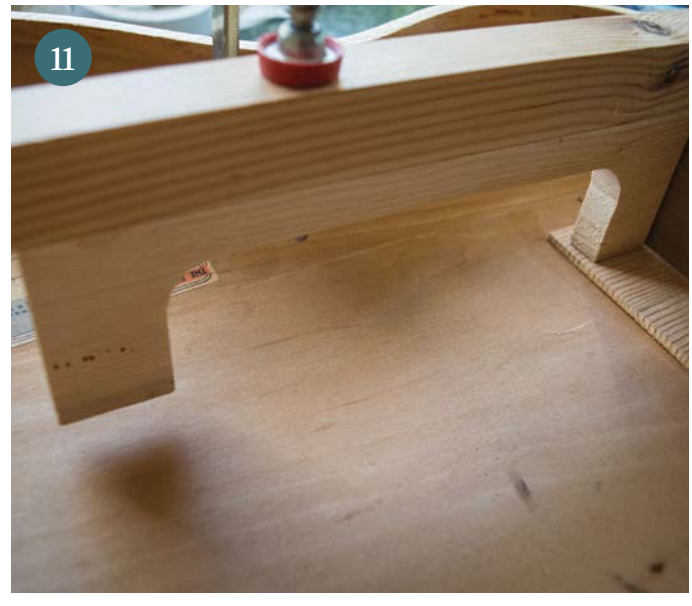
Besides the Filter'Tron-style pickups, the most significant change in a 6120-style conversion is the installation of trestle bracing. We have covered the history in other articles, but in brief Gretsch responded to main endorser Chet Atkins' request for more sustain and less feedback by devising a method to couple the front and back plates of the body together.

The design evolved over the years, but by 1960 Gretsch was using two spruce platforms attached to the underside of the top braces with the legs glued to a thin strip of wood next to the neck block and two platforms or 'feet' under the bridge.

Besides a CAT scan that Gretsch had performed, it's hard to find online specifics on vintage trestle bracing. Once again, Daniel Nicholas came to the rescue with a fantastic hand-drawn diagram and several photos taken of the inside of his 6120 **8**.







To make the trestles, I wanted some old and thoroughly dry pine. My dad's garage is full of old wood he has been hoarding for decades and I soon found a cobweb-encrusted length of Edwardian floorboard that rang like a bell. I used my router to thickness it to about 15mm and made one edge dead straight with a bearing-guided bit – the same way I trued up the fingerboard edges 9. Finally, I cut out two rectangular pieces, each measuring 22cm long and glued a thin strip of spruce onto the back, just in front of the neck block.

Having established that the bottoms of the braces were exactly in line with the tops of the neck and tail block, I clamped straight batons across the blocks to simulate the underside of a brace and positioned the spruce pieces on the strip so the front edges were making good square contact, then I clamped the pieces to the baton 10.

I drew a pencil line along the bottom of the baton, removed the spruce pieces and used a saw followed by the bearing-guided router bit to make a straight, square cut. Following the dimensions Daniel provided, I used a fret saw to turn the rectangular pieces into trestles then clamped them to the underside of the batons 11.

Fabricating the feet

The back has a decent arch, so while the front legs of the trestles were wedged nicely into position, the rear legs were floating about 1.5mm above the body. Again using Daniel's dimensions, I cut two blocks and marked their positions onto the back of the body 12.

After removing the trestles, I placed small squares of sandpaper over the feet positions and sanded the bottoms of the feet to conform to the curve – like the concave equivalent of fitting a bridge base to an archtop. Once done, I clamped the trestles back in position and used sandpaper taped to a flat surface to skim material away from the top of the feet until they just slipped under the trestle legs. I was looking for a tight fit, but it was important not to have the feet pushing the trestles upwards 13 & 14.

Back on top

At long last, the time had come to glue the top back on. Had it not been for the trestles, this would >

8 Daniel Nicholas' drawing provides the best documentation of 1960-style trestle bracing we have seen

9 By making a simple sled and flipping over a DIY routing table, you can thickness timber easily and accurately

10 A line is drawn along the underside of the baton to mark the top edge of the trestle brace

11 The cut trestle is clamped to the baton's underside to ensure the leading leg sits properly on the spruce strip by the neck block

12 While the trestle is clamped to the baton, the exact position for the 'feet' can be marked onto the back

13 After contouring the base and levelling the top, the foot squeezes into position

14 The trestles are offset because of the cutaway, but both sit squarely in the spruce strip and the feet

15 The frame does its final job as the body is reassembled with Titebond Original glue and copious clamping

have been a very quick procedure because the frame I had made for the body had held the sides in position for the best part of a year and everything still lined up.

The procedure began with identifying the exact position of the trestles and gluing them onto the underside of the top braces with hot hide glue. Gretsch used hide glue, and one of its properties is it pulls together the pieces being glued.

I applied the glue to both surfaces and clamped them fairly lightly. Speed is key because hot hide glue has a short 'open time', so you need to figure out your clamping strategy in advance and have everything ready to go. It's generally advisable to have a dry run, too.

Having left the trestles clamped overnight, I removed the clamps, placed the top in position over the body and clamped it down to test whether the front trestle legs were the correct height for the ledge I had glued against the neck block.

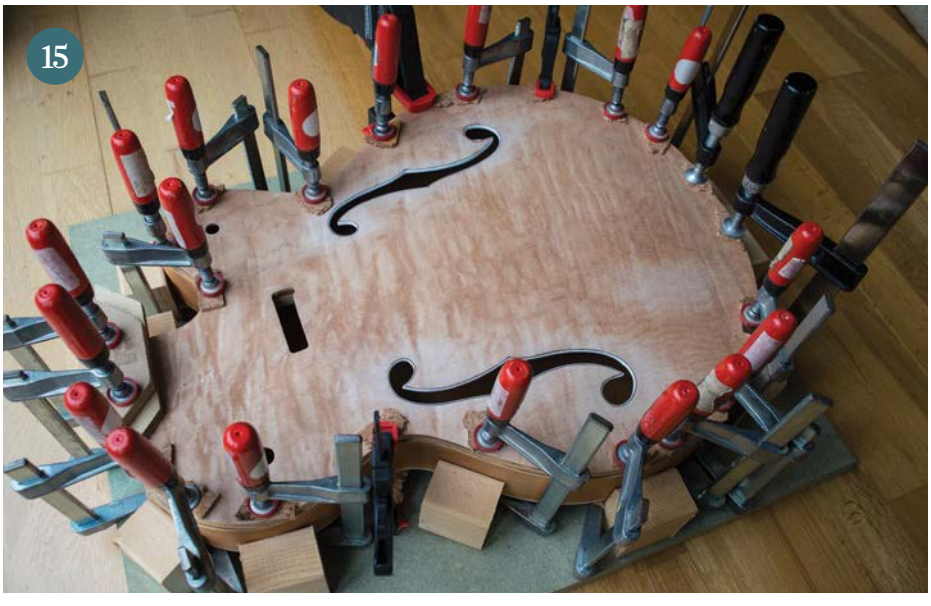
The top's edges rested about 2mm above the neck block, so relatively little clamping pressure was needed to bring the top flush. In fact, a tight fit like this is preferable because clamping the top onto the sides will create enough pressure to 'clamp' the trestle to the ledge.

Next, I fixed the feet to the back with ultra-thin double-sided tape and re-clamped the top to test the fit. I had to sand a tiny bit off the front edge of the bass-side trestle foot, but I was pretty delighted with the way everything lined up.

With the double-sided tape removed, I applied hot hide glue to the back of the body and the bottom of the feet. Placed in position, the hide glue quickly grabbed the feet and I dry-clamped the top once again to get some downward pressure on the feet as the hide glue dried. You don't need much clamping pressure with hide glue.

After a few hours, the big moment had arrived as I set about gluing the top. Although Gretsch used hide glue, I realised I wouldn't have enough time to get hot glue onto all of the surfaces before it cooled down, so I decided on Titebond Original instead.

The Titebond was spread all around the rims, over the neck and tail block and on the underside of the trestle legs. To make alignment as quick and easy as possible, I kept the body in its frame and I used



the same indexing pin method that worked so well when I glued the fingerboard back onto the neck. There's no real secret to this – just use a padded clamp wherever you can find space, wipe off the squeeze-out while the glue is still wet and resist the temptation to remove the clamps for at least 12 hours (15).

I'm pleased to report that all the wood used in this restoration has been older than the guitar itself and hide glue has been used wherever possible. The trestle bracing adds less than 100g to the weight and the glued top makes a satisfying and encouraging ping when tapped.

Figuring out how to make and fit the trestle bracing wasn't easy, and judging by the direction of the old glue drips, I suspect the Gretsch factory glued the top before the back. This old Gretsch is some body binding and a neck set away from being playable again, and you'll be able to see how it turns out in our sixth and final instalment.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw takes a well-deserved break from guitar restoration and tackles some amp mods and tone tweaks on *G&B*'s in-house Rift PR18

BLOODLINE JOHN PAGE

John Page Classic AJ

It has great pedigree, but will this twisted T-type wow us as much as John Page's three-pickup model? **RICHARD PURVIS** finds out

There's more than one famous 'J Page' in the guitar business. While Jimmy paved the way for a generation of rock guitarists, John Page has earned a whole lotta love for his luthiery skills. One of the original master builders at the Fender Custom Shop when it started up in 1987, nowadays he's designing his own instruments – with perhaps more than just a hint of influence from Leo Fender's classic designs.

Page has his own small-scale workshop in Oregon, but the Classic models are a more accessible range with production outsourced to keep the costs within reach of non-castle-owning players. We're not talking about iPhone levels of ruthless mass production, though – these instruments are crafted in Japan, where the quality of guitar building has been rivalling the Americans for over 30 years.

So, back in April we met the Classic Ashburn, a three-pickup solidbody with a few modifications to the S-type formula... and we liked it a lot. The AJ we're looking at now has much in common with the Ashburn in terms of build, but this is essentially a T-type with a single cutaway, two single coils and a familiar-looking hardtail bridge. The two things that make this definitely not a Telecaster, though, are those Bloodline by John Page pickups, both featuring alnico V magnets. The neck unit is a P-90 type – wound, we're told, for extra clarity – and the bridge unit is, as on the Ashburn, slanted the 'wrong' way. The idea here is to have the pickup further away from the bridge on the treble side to add thickness and tame those sometimes spiky highs. Presumably, it'll have the opposite effect on the wound strings, where the distance to the bridge is shorter than usual – we shall see. Might that be an issue? Well, Mr Hendrix seemed to get by alright with this arrangement on his upside-down Strats, didn't he? We'll keep an open mind...

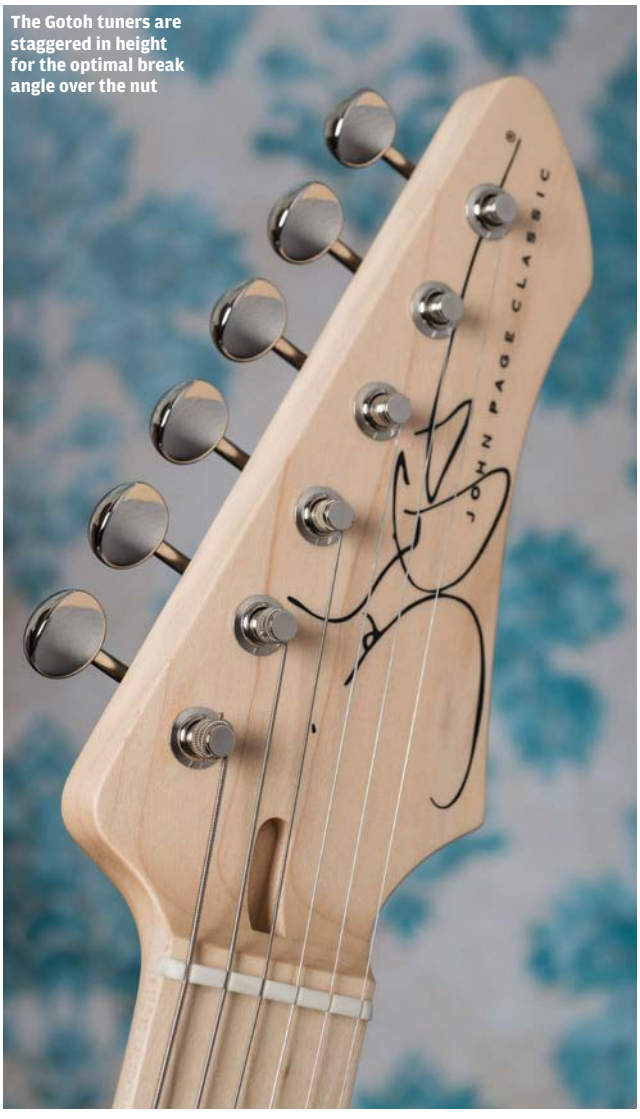
The alder body, maple neck and 25.5-inch scale are all closer to the Fender-invented tradition. That neck is a whopper, a full 23mm deep at the first fret, and this combined with a relatively lightweight body does make the AJ a >

The idea is to have the pickup further away from the bridge on the treble side to add thickness and tame spiky highs

The Bloodline by John Page P-90 type at the neck is wound for extra clarity

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £1,449
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway solidbody, made in Japan
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on medium C maple neck, 12" radius maple or rosewood board, 22 medium frets
- **HARDWARE** T-style bridge with compensated brass saddles and reversed pickup angle, Gotoh vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Bloodline by John Page pickups (JP-3T at bridge, JP-3P at neck), master volume and tone, 3-way pickup switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.5mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6.8lbs/3.1kg
- **FINISHES** Seafoam Green (as reviewed), Black Metallic, Desert Sand, Sunburst
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **coda-music.com** **johnpageclassic.com**



The Gotoh tuners are staggered in height for the optimal break angle over the nut

The heel is curved for easy access and the neck is chunky but playable

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
It's a good time to be in the market for a guitar that's broadly Fender-ish but with a twist or two. At the affordable end of the market, the **G&L Tribute Series ASAT Junior II £410** is a fine T-type with P-90s. And at the slightly less affordable end you have boutique beauties such as the **Novo Guitars Serus T** from **£2,599**, a Tele-inspired offset design with an Amalfitano P-45 at the neck, and the **Kauer Arcturus £2,049**, which you can specify with similarly mismatched pickups.

bit of a drag on the left shoulder. But we like the off-centre fret markers, placed for easy sighting from above – which is, after all, where your eyes normally live.

Do we like the headstock, though? Its angular shape is adorned with an outsize signature that's somewhat less tidy than everything else about this guitar. It could be something of an opinion-splitter.

Hardware-wise, it's all high-quality stuff, put together with classic Japanese precision – from the Gotoh tuners, staggered in height to create solid break angles over the nut without any string trees, to the brass barrel saddles, compensated for accurate intonation. As on the Ashburn, the heel of the body is curved for easier access to the screechy end of the fretboard, and the neck itself has threaded inserts for the four holding screws, ensuring maximum stability and vibration transference. Everything fits perfectly with everything else, no detail seems to have been overlooked – even the slot in the front of the headstock for access to the truss rod is a work of art – and our review guitar plays beautifully right out of the gigbag (yes, a gigbag – you don't get a hardcase for your grand and a half, which seems a tad stingy but many players find a gigbag more practical).

Colour options for this model are fairly limited, but when you can have Seafoam Green, why on earth would you take anything else? It's a vivid shade that goes beautifully with a maple board but normally suits a white scratchplate; in this case, all the plastic is black, but there's little enough of it that the overall effect is still likeable. The shape itself is one of the best attempts we've seen at the old 'a bit like a Telecaster but not too much' conundrum, with Strat-style comfort contouring on both the front and back. Oh, and are you ready for an 'awww' moment? It's called the AJ in honour of Page's first-born son, Adam John. Awww!

There's plenty of snap when you dig in and plenty of fun to be had whizzing up and down the chunky, slickly set-up neck

In use

The usual choice for beefing up the neck pickup of a T-type is a humbucker, but there's no reason why a P-90 shouldn't work as well if not better. Page's take on the classic Gibson single coil proves the point: it's as beefy as a chargrilled burger and as rich and creamy as barbecue sauce. There's plenty of snap when you dig in, plenty of smoky character when you don't, and plenty of fun to be had whizzing up and down the chunky but slickly set-up neck.

This is distinctly brighter than a normal P-90, though. Through a Vox-like amp with a Blue speaker, even without the top boost engaged, it's maybe a touch more zingy than some ears will be happy with. Luckily, the tone control has been judged perfectly to roll off treble in a totally musical way, so softer-edged tones are just a flick of the pinkie away.

First impressions of the bridge pickup are even better – and a lot of it is to do with that reversed angle. The B and high E strings have more body than you'll ever get from a normal Tele, but are still bright enough to cut through nicely, while the A and D have more upper-mid presence than usual. It's an intriguing recipe: less bass in the low strings and less treble in the high ones makes for a more focused overall tone, with the emphasis on rich, vintage twang. The only casualty is the low E, which is thinner-sounding than normal and can almost disappear completely in crunchy chords. This is not a djent guitar.

Put those two sounds together and we should be in for something very interesting in the hum-cancelling middle position. In fact, it's pretty much the best of both, with a load of phasey cluck thrown in as a bonus. In EQ terms, we're closest to the neck pickup, with no shortage of warmth on the wound strings, but the added twanginess of the bridge pup does a wonderful job of livening up clean chords and arpeggios. Aptly enough, given the surfy colour, this thing sounds almost more like a Jaguar than a Telecaster now... and that's a compliment.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A well designed, nicely crafted guitar
+ Looks distinctive without being too flash
+ Meaty tones with plenty of character

- Some might find the bridge pickup rather lightweight
- Not cheap, and some players prefer a hardcase

A neat and versatile instrument that doesn't sound quite as Tele-ish as it looks

9/10

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D'Angelico NEW YORK

Crimson Guitars Artist Descendant 61 & One Series Descendant

Two good-looking electrics from a UK firm celebrating more than 12 years in the business. **SIMON BRADLEY** gives them a whirl

Crimson Guitars, based in Dorchester, is the brainchild of master luthier Ben Crowe, who turned his skills to the design and production of custom instruments in 2005. He also had the idea of producing a series of entertaining and engaging videos and podcasts that cover just about anything any budding luthier could wish to know – including mini tutorials, product demos and much more. We can highly recommend the Guitar Builder's Basics series, and we'd suggest heading to crimsonguitars.com to take a look.

Ben also offers one-on-one luthiery courses and Crimson even makes its own commercially available tools. All this has enabled the company to build up a vibrant online community, which has certainly helped the word to well and truly get out there. Noted Crimsoneers include the likes of the criminally underrated Jakko Jakszyk and Sir Robert of Fripp, which certainly works for us.

The range of guitars the company puts its name to can be split roughly into two halves: Masterbuilt and Custom – where the sky's pretty much the limit – and Production, which, alongside the more Les Paul-like PAF and PAF Hollow designs, includes the two examples of the Descendant body shape we have on test, one from the Artist Series and the other from the One range. We'll stick to the exact spec of these two guitars for the purpose of this review, but if you fancy different materials, finishes or electronics, Crimson will always be happy to talk over your options.

The Descendant 61 comes from the Artist Series, in which there are various combinations of woods. This one has a flamed maple neck, top and backplates alongside an ebony neck. Other options include zebrano and rosewood on the Descendant 74, and wenge and ebony for the Descendant 88.

Made from a single piece of flame maple, the neck is lovely, giving a genuine custom-shop vibe into the bargain, and is finished with an eminently tactile and flawless light-gloss finish. The ebony board's shaped edges are lovely, and the reduced heel and deep cutaway invites you all the way up the neck. The headstock face has a full-gloss finish, as does the rest of the guitar, and the board bristles with polished-steel inlays.

Made from a single piece of flame maple, the neck is lovely, giving a genuine custom-shop vibe into the bargain

The body is constructed from two pieces of solid ash and is subtly decorated with two rear backplates, also of flamed maple. With a body over 41mm thick, this is a hefty guitar, but the contrast of the top's Black Cherry finish with that of the Natural Ash doesn't so much suggest inherent quality as yell it in your ear. Described by Crimson as a flat-top, there are no contours to speak of, save a rounding of the body's edge that brings out the natural, scraped faux-binding.

The pickups loaded into both guitars are covered Valenti humbuckers, also made at Crimson's Dorset HQ. Named after the luthier who designed them, they are described as a modern take on the good old PAF and are rated at 8.4k (bridge) and 7.3k (neck). It's worth mentioning that Crimson offers the option of a pair of its own Aquila P-90s should you prefer. Controlled in both cases by single volume and tone pots and a three-way toggle, the 61's tonal arsenal is enhanced by the inclusion of a push/pull coil-split.

The other Descendant is taken from the One range and, although it offers the same body shape as the 61, is somewhat different in vibe and spec. It's certainly more down to earth, and its two-piece ash body features backplates fashioned from meranti. The satin-finished neck is also made from meranti, sometimes referred to as Philippine mahogany. Crimson's James Blackburn tells us more. "Meranti is as close to mahogany as you can get >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

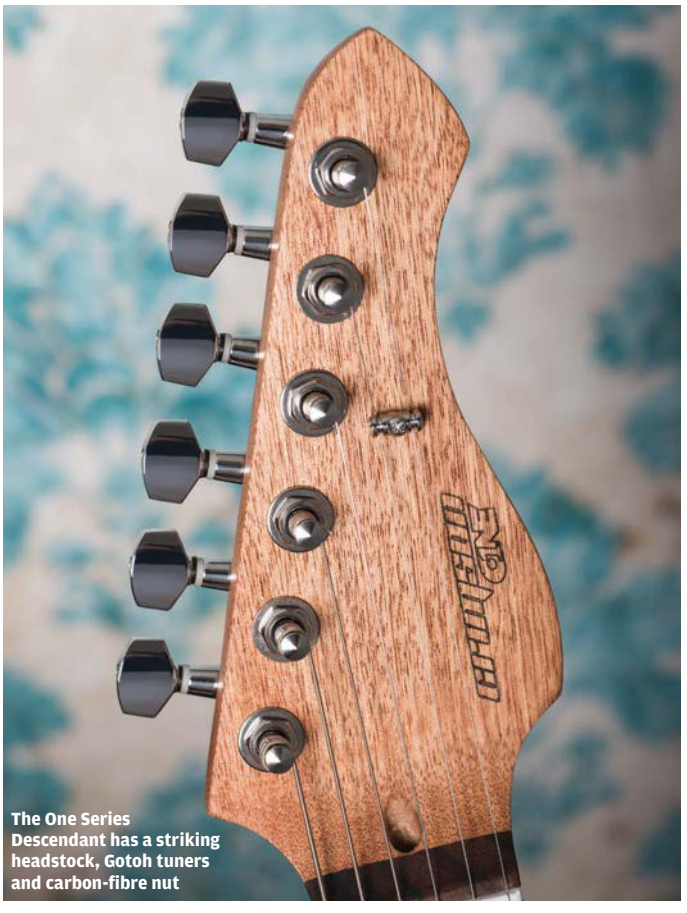
Artist Descendant 61

Fender's **US Standard Telecaster HH** **£1,309** features two Twin Head humbuckers, while the evergreen **Yamaha 1611MS Pacifica Mike Stern Signature** **£1,535** has a pair of Seymour Duncan humbuckers. Also check out **ESP**'s **E-II** in see-thru Black Cherry **£1,599** for an irresistible 'EMG active power meets classic vibe' combo.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

One Series Descendant

Pete Townshend began using Schecter/Roger Giffin T-types during 1979, and the well-priced **Schecter PT** **£545** is the modern equivalent. The **Cort MBC-1 Matt Bellamy** **£499** is a nicely stripped-back alternative to the superb yet pricey Manson models, while **Fender**'s **Classic Series '72 Tele Deluxe** **£769** has a pair of Fender's repro Wide Range humbuckers.


The One Series Descendant has a striking headstock, Gotoh tuners and carbon-fibre nut

Ash and flamed maple contrast nicely around the back of the 61

without actually being mahogany," he says. "It has very similar grain, weight and tone, and we have selected the best pieces to make sure we have the right wood for making necks."

It's not as red as mahogany but, with a tight grain and a warming brown hue, it certainly looks the part. The neck feels somewhat large and, with minimal apparent rolling of the fingerboard edges, comes as something of a shock when you first pick it up. Don't be put off, though, as it doesn't take too long to become accustomed and it proves the diversity across the range.

In use

Considering the difference in spec, it'll come as no surprise that the guitars have contrasting voices. The Descendant 61 is the more tonally versatile and balanced, with plenty of maple-enhanced high-end bite that's kept in check by the compact lows and middly sustain of the ash.

Bereft of a maple cap and neck, the One Series Descendant is tonally sweeter and more rounded, with the neck pickup's throaty character particularly worthy of mention. The low end is sufficient for emotive blues licks and, as you increase gain levels, the tone stays with you without straying into the land of mush. The treble pickup is also nicely balanced and is just the ticket for rock styles of pretty much all intensities; it's capable of some lovely clean sounds at low guitar volume, too.

If the One Series had a coil-split like the 61, it would increase its versatility, but we're impressed with the performance and range of the Crimson 'buckers across both guitars. Despite only minimal dimensional differences, the One Series' neck feels much chunkier than the more traditional taper of the 61, but both guitars play very nicely indeed.

We can't really argue with the One Series Descendant's £800 price tag: it's good value considering its custom roots, and it sounds good, too. The figure of £1,400 for the Artist Descendant 61, whilst obviously positioning it in an area of the market populated by some heavyweight names, is reasonable and the look of our example is most enticing. Crimson is one of several UK brands that are making jaw-dropping instruments at the moment, and if you've yet to experience one of its guitars, we suggest putting right that wrong – pronto.

KEY FEATURES

Crimson Guitars Artist Descendant 61

- **PRICE** £1,400 (with Hiscox Liteflite case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in Great Britain
- **BUILD** Two-piece solid ash with flamed maple top and backplates; flamed maple neck with matt finish; ebony fingerboard with 12-inch radius, ebony/steel inlays and 22 nickel-silver medium/jumbo frets; carbon fibre nut and Gotoh tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Crimson Valenti humbuckers (with option of 2x Crimson Aquila P-90s)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone, three-way toggle and push/pull coil-split
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Black Cherry (as reviewed), Natural, Midnight Blue, Blue Jeans, Charcoal Black, Vintage Amber
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.63kg/8lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Tonally versatile
+ Looks great
+ Range of custom options

– Price puts it in the same ballpark as some serious competition

Some lovely flamed maple makes this Descendant 61 well worth checking out. It sounds as good as it looks, too

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Crimson Guitars One Series Descendant

- **PRICE** £800 (with Hiscox Liteflite case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in Great Britain
- **BUILD** Two-piece solid ash with meranti backplates; meranti neck with matt finish; rosewood fingerboard with 12-inch radius, white inlays and 22 nickel-silver medium/jumbo frets; corian nut and chrome tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Crimson Valenti humbuckers (with option of 2x Crimson Aquila P-90s)
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone, three-way toggle
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Black (as reviewed), Natural, Red, Blue
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38.5mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.54kg/7.8lbs
- **CONTACT** Crimson Guitars 01300 348863 **crimsonguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent price
+ Cool, stripped-down look
+ Impressive tonal performance

– Chunky neck will polarise opinion
– A coil-split or tap would be welcome

A well-priced, UK-made singlecut with an unmistakable custom vibe that's great for rock, even better for metal

8/10

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SETH BACCUS NAUTILUS CLASSIC £3,899

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Seth Baccus Nautilus Classic

Does the world need another posh single-cut? When it's one that's this good, **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** says yes...

We encountered Seth Baccus at the recent Holy Grail Guitar Show in Berlin and were hugely impressed by the quality of his work. The stepson of master acoustic luthier Andy Manson, Baccus grew up amongst sawdust, musical instruments and musicians. He also helped out in Manson's workshop while still at college. Baccus went on to manage Andy's brother Hugh Manson's guitar shop in Exeter, and it was through that role that he worked with Muse and became a touring tech for John Paul Jones – he was part of the crew for the Led Zeppelin reunion show at London's O2 arena in 2007.

Baccus began building his own guitars in 2004 and left Mansons in 2009 to become a full-time luthier. Sharing a workshop in Portugal with Andy Manson, Baccus launched his set-neck, single-cutaway Nautilus in 2012 and the range now comprises Drop Top, Hollow Body, Modern and Classic models – it's the latter we have here.

The Nautilus Classic is clearly influenced by Gibson's most famous electric single-cut, but twists come in the shape of a 25.5-inch scale length and, on this particular example, a chambered swamp ash body with a flame-maple cap. Even when measured by the standards typical in this lofty price bracket, the quality of the Nautilus' construction is very clean and the attractive sections of European flamed maple selected for the top and neck are accentuated beautifully by the double-stained Faded Charcoal finish.

Despite filling out to more than an inch in depth, the 'Deep C' neck profile is effortlessly playable and feels svelte and speedy thanks to a carve that's almost V-shaped in the way it fills the palm but has very little shoulder to get in the way. Deep C and light overall weight notwithstanding, the Nautilus is certainly no diver and balances superbly on a strap.

In use

On plugging into a clean-ish 6V6-powered amp, with a touch of spring reverb providing the ambience, we're struck immediately by the bell-like purity of the Nautilus Classic's voice – it will defy the expectations >

Despite filling out to more than an inch in depth, the 'Deep C' neck profile is effortlessly playable, svelte and speedy

An elegant neck join offers easy access to the upper frets

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £3,899 (inc Hiscox hardcase)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway electric guitar
- **BUILD** One-piece chambered swamp ash body with flamed European maple top, one-piece flamed European maple neck with 'Deep C' profile, bound 12" radius Indian rosewood fingerboard with mother-of-pearl crown inlays and 22 medium-jumbo Jescar frets, ebony headstock veneer
- **HARDWARE** TonePros locking AVR2 bridge and aluminium tailpiece, Gotoh 510 Super machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** Bare Knuckle Stormy Monday (neck) and VH2 (bridge) humbucking pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone (with pull-push coil splits), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.6mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.9mm at first fret, 25.9mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.3mm at nut, 52.1mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6.9lbs/3.1kg
- **FINISH** Double-stained Faded Charcoal top and neck, finished in high-gloss polyurethane
- **CONTACT**
  www.sethbaccus.com
  www.worldguitars.co.uk

The headstock is accented with an ebony veneer

The chambered swamp ash back has a natural finish

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **PRS McCarty 594** starts at **£3,649** and takes its name from its 24.594-inch scale length. That's not the only thing it has in common with a vintage Gibson: despite being a double-cut, the volume and tone controls are situated as they would be on a Les Paul. 58/15 'low turn' humbuckers and partial coil-splits offer a range of beautiful tones. Former PRS man Joe **Knaggs** developed the **SSC £2,999** in collaboration with Steve Stevens, and its boutique single-cut configuration and pair of Bare Knuckle pickups make it a worthy rival for your attention.

of anyone who assumes that a twin-humbucker single-cut is all about midrange push and brute force. There's plenty of air, and the chambered construction and Fender-style scale length help the Nautilus sound open, expansive and almost semi-acoustic.

The brushed-nickel covered Bare Knuckle pickups are an excellent choice. At 8.9k, the VHII in the bridge is a little hotter than most vintage humbuckers, but its PAF-like high end and harmonic complexity is perhaps unsurprising given that the 'raw energy and brown sound of the late 70s' that Bare Knuckle says it is voiced to capture is a nod to the tones that Eddie Van Halen created using his 'Frankenstein' guitar, fitted with an original PAF removed from his Gibson ES-335.

The extended, musical treble of the bridge pickup's voicing in combination with the Nautilus' construction means that chiming Johnny Marr chords, Nile Rodgers funk and even country cleans aren't out of the question – it doesn't just cover those bases, either, it sounds really rather good.

Gained up, the clear treble response translates into serious lead tones that really sing, and while there's not the forceful, tight bass for chugging metal, classic rock rhythms are well served. The well-balanced Stormy Monday neck pickup is a smart choice alongside the VHII – its slightly scooped mids and extended highs mean there's no woolliness; instead, you get a pleasing blend of clarity and cream that suits slow, expressive blues lead. Whether clean or dirty, the twin-pickup sound is smooth, laid back and well suited to lashings of ambience.

Despite the undoubtedly bling-y boutique vibe of the rippling flametop, this feels like a bona fide player's guitar

The Gibson-style top hat knobs look the part but aren't the easiest to pull upwards when you want to engage the coil-split, which is activated via each pickup's tone pot. That said, when either or both coil-splits are employed, it unlocks a range of quieter, thinner voices that could prove useful for sections where you need an 'unboost' effect. It's perhaps a reflection of how well the Bare Knuckles are voiced in full-humbucking mode that we didn't find ourselves feeling the need to turn to the coil-splits too often.

Seth Baccus' love for his craft translates into a rare attention to detail, but we're not talking about soulless perfection: there's a warm heart beating in the Nautilus and it's a guitar that's as inspiring as it is toneful. It also has one of our favourite necks of the year and, despite the undoubtedly bling-y boutique vibe of the rippling flametop and high-gloss poly finish, this still feels like a bona fide player's guitar and no ornament – musically, it opens doors and no mistake.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Wonderful neck shape
+ Versatile range of harmonically-rich sounds
+ Exceptionally clean build

– Coil-splits tricky to engage due to top hat knobs

There's fierce competition in the high-end single-cut stakes, but the Nautilus is a serious contender

9/10

Gardiner Houlgate

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GODIN SESSION CUSTOM/LIMITED EDITION £529

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Godin Session Custom/Limited Edition

A custom version of the North American workhorse with an unusual Coral Blue finish. **SIMON BRADLEY** dives in

Guitar finishes are a highly personal aspect of the buying process and, irrespective of spec, brand or even intended use, if a potential axe of choice isn't available in a favourable colour, it's unlikely you'll be walking out of the store with it. Of course, transparent and 'burst finishes still allow the grain of the body wood to peer coquettishly through as ever it did; but it was Fender, by offering to produce instruments in customer-requested custom colours, that really began the ball rolling towards the swatch of finishes available today.

At the turn of the 60s, Fender made this range of "Custom finishes for fine electric instruments..." available to all, standardising its entire palette for guitar and bass. Continuing to use DuPont car paint along with either Duco nitrocellulose or Lucite acrylic lacquers, the company's 1961 colour chart included such staples as Sonic Blue, Inca Silver Metallic and Shell Pink. Happily, sunburst options remained available at no extra cost, although the company would take any body with a sub-standard sunburst finish and simply spray an opaque custom colour over the top.

Providing new or unusual shades and finishes is a relatively simple method of both reinvigorating a model and helping it to stand out from the crowd, and this is what Godin has done with this so-called Custom/Limited Edition of the always-impressive Session. We say 'so-called' as, despite the guitar's somewhat unwieldy title, the Coral Blue finish will be available on examples without restriction.

"It was initially supposed to be a limited-run guitar," confirms Godin's Pasquale Cristiano. "But it was so popular that we kept it in the line-up and left the 'Limited' designation on there, seeing that it's a model that stands out from the remainder of the Session range thanks to its cool colour."

We're struggling to think of another guitar with a similar finish and, using Fender's familiar choice of colours as a comparison, it's far closer to turquoise than the classic Sea Foam Green. In true 'burst style, it grades from opaque around the body's edge >

We're struggling to think of another guitar with a similar finish – it's far closer to turquoise than Sea Foam Green

Godin's in-house HSS pickups are impressively hot and aggressive

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £529 (with padded Godin gigbag and straplocks)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar. Manufactured in Canada, assembled in USA
- **BUILD** Canadian Laurentian basswood body and three-ply white scratchplate; Rock maple neck with gloss headstock; rosewood fingerboard (maple available) with 12-inch radius and 22 medium jumbo frets; two-point Godin vibrato with Tru-Loc system
- **ELECTRICS** One covered Godin humbucker and two Godin GS-1 single coils
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone, with push/pull humbucker coil split on tone pot; five-way Blade selector
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Black Burst (£549) finish with a rosewood neck only
- **FINISH** Coral Blue (as reviewed) and Black Burst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 52.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.63kg/8lbs
- **CONTACT** 440 Distribution 0113 258 9599 www.godinguitars.com

The comfortable Rock maple neck culminates in a gloss headstock

The two-point Godin vibrato with Tru-Loc system

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
With its 70s vibe and an Alnico V humbucker, **Fender**'s **Standard HSS Strat £559** is as cool as ever, covering a wealth of tonal bases. An even more affordable option is the excellent **Yamaha Pacifica 212VFM £320** which, with Alnico V pickups and a maple top, represents serious value for money. Close to the pinnacle of all things blue is the Ocean Blue **Relic Paisley Steelcaster** offered by James Trussart. Such is the sheer quality and palpable vibe that the price of over **£4,500** is justifiable.

to semi-transparent at the centre, thus allowing the basswood's grain to be partly visible: it truly is a striking effect. Reactions from colleagues upon setting eyes on it have ranged from tearful declarations of adoration to rather more unflattering exclamations. In the opinion of this reviewer at least, its uniqueness is rather appealing and it could make a refreshing change from the raft of sunburst guitars that inhabit shop floors across the country.

Pickups comprise a set of Godin's in-house units – in this case a covered humbucker and two GS-1 single coils. There's a standard five-way blade selector that combines them in the traditional manner, and the tone pot doubles as a push/pull coil split for the 'bucker.

The basswood body demonstrates the more streamlined 2016 Session shape, which also incorporates an extended lower cutaway and, irrespective of your views on the finish, we're convinced that just about any player will quickly find themselves smitten by the gorgeous neck. Constructed from a single piece of north-east Canadian rock maple, we'd happily extol the virtues of the beautifully rounded edges and shallow D profile to anyone who'll listen. As is the case across the Godin catalogue, the Session is available with either a maple or rosewood 'board, and the playability is enhanced further by the curves of the offset four-screw heel, that allow you access all the way up to the 22nd medium jumbo fret.

In use

We've looked at a number of contemporary Godins over the past year or two and, again, we're struck immediately by the aggressive nature of the pickups upon plugging in: these things are hot. We're not complaining, especially due to the efficiency of the tone pot in smoothing off the edges to a degree and, when called upon to do so, the Session can really scream.

Continuing the seaside theme, we began our sound tests by getting our Dick Dale on, with the solo'd split humbucker really giving our surf licks an aggressive bite. The two single coils are hardly shrinking violets either and, while the tone changes with the pickup selections in the usual manner, that trebly spike remains discernable throughout. There's no doubt that, in this area, the Session is insufficiently equipped to authentically mimic the mellow tones of, for example, a vintage-voiced Strat, but we do feel that it will allow you to obtain a sound that, like the finish, will stand out from the tonal herd.

We're struck by the aggressive nature of the pickups upon plugging in: these things are hot. We're not complaining

Adding amp drive can, of course, add to the treble edge and, when using both our 1985 Marshall 2203 and Hughes & Kettner TubeMeister, we spent a minute with the EQ to rein in the high end. The humbucker is great for rock, although more Iron Maiden than Thin Lizzy, and both rhythm and solo passages possess character, cut and definition.

Whether you'd play modern metal on a Coral Blue guitar is a choice for the individual but, should you choose to do so, you'll be pleasantly surprised by the depth and drive available from a scooped high-gain amp tone. Those Tremonti-style low-string pinched harmonics have never been so simple to pull off. However, we found ourselves dialing the gain back down and upping the reverb after a time – and if, like this reviewer, you find a vintage-style Fender Jaguar rather unstable and complicated, this is a great guitar for those *Wipe Out* moments.

It's pretty impressive in most other areas too and, what's more, this particular Session is amongst a small number of contemporary guitars that cost less today than they did a year ago. 2016's price of £529 is a full £20 below what it was – and all for a tonally versatile and beautifully made electric with a look of its own.

To say that players are spoiled for choice when it comes to affordable HSS-configured guitars these days is an understatement, and if you haven't tried a Godin Session you really should. For us, that Coral Blue finish is the icing on a particularly tasty and tonesome cake: don't let it put you off.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Very comfortable neck
+ Striking finish at a great price
+ Versatile tones

– Tones might be too aggressive for some
– Finish unlikely to appeal to everyone

The lauded features of the Session with a finish that stands out from the crowd, all at a truly excellent price

8/10

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Guild M-20 & D-20

Guild's high-end acoustics recently found a new home in California. **HUW PRICE** tests two models from Guild's brand new USA Series

The editor's email arrived, saying a couple of Guilds were on their way. We guitar reviewers are often last to know exactly what we're getting, but when a diminutive case was pulled from its shipping box this Nick Drake enthusiast was thrilled to behold a fabled *Bryter Layter*-style M-20, seen here in Vintage Sunburst, but also available in Natural, just like the guitar that Drake posed with on the cover of his second long-player.

Poor Nick's M-20 must have been fairly new. Guild made the first ones in 1967, having recently opened a factory in Westerly, Rhode Island, and Guild carried on making guitars there until Fender bought the company in 1995. Production then moved to California, where the workers assembled and finished Westerly-made 'kits'.

Over the following years, Guild production shifted to Tacoma, Washington and then to New Hartford, Connecticut. In 2014, Fender closed the plant to sell off the company. Having acquired the Guild brand, the Cordoba Music Group opened a new manufacturing facility in Oxnard, California and shipped the old factory equipment west on flatbed trucks. Under the watchful eye of former Gibson Montana master luthier Ren Ferguson, the first production models channel the spirit of the late 1960s, with the concert-sized M-20 joined by the D-20 dreadnought also on review here.

The M-20 has an all-solid but unbound mahogany body with a mortise and tenon jointed mahogany neck, and a rosewood bridge and fingerboard. Decoration is confined to an ABS plastic rosette ring and simple pearl dot markers to match the inlayed headstock logo.

The D-20's design dates back to 1968 and it's an all-solid, all-mahogany dreadnought. All the hardware and appointments are the same as the M-20's and it comes in a hardshell case with a built-in humidifier and the option of an LR Baggs Element pickup system.

In use

Any notion that the all-mahogany construction may subdue the treble response is quickly dispelled. >

Play lightly and the D-20 speaks with a silvery sweetness, attack the strings and it responds with a percussive hi-hat cut

These all-mahogany American-made guitars befit the heritage of the Guild name

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

M-20

Martin's **000-15SM** **£1,634** has a slotted headstock, 12 frets and a solid mahogany body, but no pickup system or cutaway. **The Taylor 322** **£1,518** combines a solid mahogany top with a solid blackwood back and sides.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

D-20

The **Martin D-15M** **£1,515** is another all-solid mahogany dreadnought with open-gear tuners. Also check the **Faith Mars** **£692** with its all-solid mahogany body and gloss finish.

A bone nut and Guild vintage-style open-gear tuners with cream buttons are present on both guitars

Granted, the M-20 doesn't have the sheen of a spruce top, but it's at least as bright as the cedar-topped Seagulls we reviewed last month and there's no shortage of clarity.

Whether you could say the same about the bass response depends on expectations. It's true this isn't a deep-sounding guitar, but the body is pretty tiny after all – and with that caveat, the M-20 generates a surprising amount of low-end thump. The A and E strings certainly aren't subsumed by the middle and treble frequencies.

In terms of sonic character, there's a lot of charm, with a typically dry and woody all-mahogany directness. There are harmonic overtones aplenty, but fundamental frequencies are not overpowered and the M-20's clarity and definition impress in standard and deeply dropped tunings.

It's a natural for fingerstyle that, after a short warm-up period, delivers excellent string-to-string balance without any randomly spiky transients or dominant notes. Depending on your preference, the M-20 lends its voice to blues, country and general rootsy Americana duties. However, it's equally convincing delivering intimate and ethereal folk voicings in a variety of tunings.

The unavoidable question is whether you can get the *Pink Moon* tone from the M-20. We would say the answer is 'not quite, yet'. However, the potential is most certainly there and when the new strings dull down, or with a set of warmer-sounding strings fitted, this M-20 will certainly move in that direction.

Volume, a huge frequency range, thunderous bass and understated power characterise the D-20's tone. Even those of us who have never understood the aesthetic appeal of dreadnoughts would have to think again after one glorious strum.

The term 'piano-like' is used occasionally to describe acoustic guitars. Assuming it to mean massive harmonic complexity, a sense of drama and scale, and a solidity of tone, the term is apposite here. The D-20 may lack the scything cut of a spruce top end, but it's by no means dark sounding. In fact, it's even richer and quicker to respond than the M-20.

The bass end is vast, but superbly defined and devoid of boominess. It's such a chest-filling and elastic thud that it's hard to resist hitting open E chords at every opportunity, or exploring ever-deeper tunings, for the sheer sensory pleasure of it.

With the power comes great refinement and balance because there's no midrange scoop or hyped treble. Consequently, the D-20 is every bit as good for delicate fingerpicking as solid strumming. The dynamic range is vast and the tone changes with playing intensity. Play lightly and the D-20 speaks with a silvery sweetness, but attack the strings hard and it responds with a percussive hi-hat cut.

Despite having been in transit, both guitars arrived pretty much in tune, and it's apparent that they leave the Guild factory set up properly. The nuts are fitted to perfection, with slots that need no fettling, and it's pleasing to see bone saddles have been used. After all, bone is what Guild would have employed on the originals, and while we're not saying that it's unquestionably the best-sounding stuff, we've yet to encounter any material – natural or otherwise – that sounds better. The action is also easy-playing without being buzzy, and the intonation is about as good as it gets on factory-made acoustic guitars.

We have high hopes for the M-20 and suspect it may even improve when 'duller' later. Given its diminutive size and all-mahogany construction, it's a guitar that defies expectations. As for the D-20, it has the smooth grandeur that we'd more usually associate with 12th-fret neck joints, and the way notes combine to form clear chord voicings is something special indeed.

Our overall impression is that the powers that be at the new Guild factory are showing due deference to Guild's heritage and no corners are being cut. Back in the day, Guild was up there with the best and we're pleased to report that it still is.

KEY FEATURES

M-20

- **PRICE** £1,585
- **DESCRIPTION** Concert-sized 6-string acoustic guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid mahogany top, back and sides, mahogany neck, rosewood bridge, rosewood fingerboard, 14th-fret neck join, bone nut and saddle, ABS rosette
- **HARDWARE** Guild vintage-style open-gear 20:1 tuners with cream buttons
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19.5mm at first fret, 20.5mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38.5mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.5lbs/1.57kg
- **FINISH** Satin varnish vintage sunburst
- **OPTIONS** LR Baggs Element with volume and tone control, clear finish
- **CONTACT** Selectron 01795 419460 **www.guildguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sweet tone
+ Quality construction
+ Easy playability
+ Humidifier in hardcase

– Will sound better once it has 'mellowed up' slightly

Perhaps a niche sort of guitar, but it's packed with sonic charm and we love the retro looks

8/10

KEY FEATURES

D-20

- **PRICE** £1,489
- **DESCRIPTION** Dreadnought-sized 6-string acoustic guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid mahogany top, back and sides, mahogany neck, rosewood bridge, rosewood fingerboard, 14th-fret neck join, bone nut and compensated bone saddle, ABS rosette
- **HARDWARE** Guild vintage-style open-gear 20:1 tuners with cream buttons
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650.9mm/25 5/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.5lbs/2kg
- **FINISH** Satin varnish natural
- **OPTIONS** LR Baggs Element with volume and tone control, vintage sunburst finish

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Huge tone and massive bass
+ Quality construction
+ Very playable
+ Also has humidifier in case

– Not an archetypal dreadnought voicing

The D-20 combines the huge bass and sheer power of a thoroughbred dreadnought with a fuller midrange and better frequency balance

9/10

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Swart Super Space Tone 30 amp head

Not for the first time, **HUW PRICE** finds himself on a voyage of tone courtesy of North Carolina's boutique amp guru Michael Swart

Many tweed amps finished the 1960s painted black. Although it may be sacrilegious to say it, they might have looked pretty good judging by the sprayed and hand-rubbed finish on Swart's Super Space Tone 30 head and matching open-back cabinet loaded with two Celestion G12M-65 Creamback drivers.

Handwired in Swart's usual point-to-point style, this valve-rectified 30-watter runs a quartet of cathode-biased 6V6s and features onboard reverb and tremolo. A three-way impedance switch enables the SST-30 to run into 4, 8 or 16 ohms and there's a socket for an effects footswitch. There's also a feature seldom seen in the boutique amp world – a master volume.

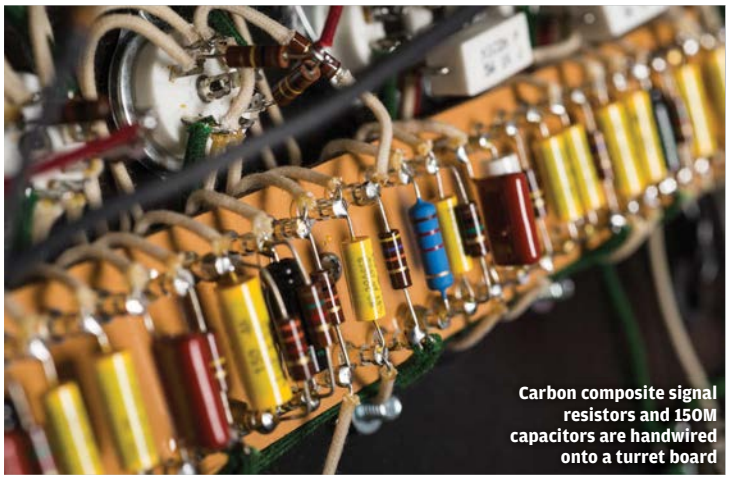
In use

Master volume amps have acquired a bad rep amongst some members of the guitar community. Much of this stems from ill-conceived binary thinking that assumes power-valve distortion is good and preamp-valve distortion is bad. You get a taste of both even in the 'purest' of vintage amps.

Non-master classics generally have to be cranked up to hit the desired doses of overdrive and sustain, with the amp ending up painfully loud. Master volumes were initially devised to allow players to get their preamp valves into the right zone, while controlling the overall level.

You could argue there were some tonal compromises involved, but for those not fixated with maximum gain at minimum volume, a well-implemented master volume in a medium-power amp can open up tonal possibilities. That's where this Swart head slots right in.

It may help to break things down and take a closer look at the controls. Setting the tremolo and reverb >



Carbon composite signal resistors and 150M capacitors are handwired onto a turret board

KEY FEATURES

Swart Super Space Tone 30

- **PRICE** £2,379 (head), £779 (cab)
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel cathode-biased valve head with reverb and tremolo, made in USA
- **POWER RATING** 30W
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 1x 12DW7, 4x 6V6, 1x GZ34
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input sockets, hi/lo switch, volume, tone, space, speed, depth, master, power, standby
- **REAR PANEL** 3-way speaker impedance switch, footswitch socket
- **SPEAKER** 2x Celestion G12H-65 Creamback
- **DIMENSIONS** 260x559x238mm (head), 466x717x279mm (cab)
- **WEIGHT** 15.9Kg/35lbs (head), 17.7Kg/39lbs (cab)
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **coda-music.com** **swartamps.com**

Anatomy of...

1 Satellite of Lo
The Lo input complements the Hi input and shouldn't be overlooked

2 Hi altitude
The Hi/Lo gain switch enhances versatility and works with both inputs

3 Super pulsar
Three 12AX7s handle preamp and tremolo duties with Swart's favoured 12DW7 for reverb

4 ET tone home
Unlike a tweed circuit, the tone control adjusts treble without noticeably affecting gain

5 Space travel
Space sets the reverb level and as it is independent of the volume control you can go 100 per cent wet

6 Blast-off
30W is generated by a quartet of cathode-biased 6V6 power valves

7 Master of the universe
The master volume works superbly with no discernable sonic downside

8 Black whole
Swart applies black lacquer over tweed cloth for a unique texture and look

A Celestion G12H Creamback is the stock speaker, but Celestion Cream and Gold Alnicos are available to order

Tap into your tone with controls that all go to 11

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Amps with four 6V6s are surprisingly scarce because most manufacturers move over to 6L6s to get more power. Even so, you can check out the **Carr Slant V6 £2,899** or the **Gartone Bluesman 35/40 £1,795**.

effects aside for the moment, because neither are actually in the direct signal path, you're left with volume, tone and master. If you turn the master up to 11, it's effectively out of circuit – which leaves us with volume and tone.

Even so, volume, tone and master interact to provide a surprisingly wide range of clean and driven sounds, various tones of overdrive and transparent level control. Then there's the versatile input arrangement. While some of us – this reviewer included – are sometimes guilty of overlooking low-level inputs, you'd be missing a trick with this amp. Its lo input can be used to extend clean headroom without things getting dull or lifeless. The hi/lo switch also operates on both inputs and, although subtle, we find the lo input switched to hi is a tad more chimy and open than the chewier and thicker sound of the lo-switched hi input.

Obviously, the starting point for clean tones is lo/lo with the master fully up, and with Strat pickups things stay clean until the volume reaches around 8 or 9. We use 'clean' in a qualified way because the SST-30 is clean in a Voxy rather than Fender-like manner. This means the tone is bolstered by harmonic overtones without being overtly overdriven.

Although the treble response is sweetly extended, the SST-30 doesn't have the inherent mid scoop of a blackface or silverface-style circuit. The reverb gels superbly, almost like a classic studio effect, and whether you dial in robust and full jazz tones or cutting blues and funk, the SST-30 retains a full-bodied sonic quality that will enhance any guitar you plug in.

Switch to hi and the overdrive threshold drops to around five with single coils. The overdrive begins as increased throatiness in the low mids and soon develops into a full-frequency roar that's overlaid with harmonic sparkle. The SST-30 compresses beautifully and you'll also notice how a hard attack pushes the mids, while a lighter attack maintains sheen through the treble.

With the volume and tone maxed out, the SST-30 gets very overdriven, but it's more refined and less fierce than, for example, a late-50s tweed Deluxe or Super-type circuit. It's also fuller than Fender's 60s designs and airier than the 'forced' treble of a top-boosted Vox circuit.

Don't be deceived by the apparently simple controls, because the SST-30 is the most versatile Swart we've tried

Switching to hi/hi mode is a thrilling experience. You can still adjust frequency response through playing dynamics, but there's loads more overdrive and compression. With humbuckers, the SST-30 sets off an avalanche of harmonics with tenacious sustain and crisp pick attack.

The master control is an intriguing feature. There's no loss of tone, or any sense that the output valves are contributing less to the overall sound. In a sense, it sounds more like power scaling, but without the grittiness or uneven decay that often accompanies that approach. However, you may notice more subtle changes as the SST-30's natural compression becomes more pronounced. Setting the volume high and master low, there is a front-end squish followed by a slight swell in volume that's very conducive to soloing.

Those with keen ears will also discover how high volume and low master settings loosen up the lows and fatten up the low mids. To tighten the bass and open up the low mids, you can back off the volume slightly and turn up the master to compensate.

The onboard effects are up to Swart's habitually high standards. The tremolo produces a heartbreaking throb that increases the overdrive very slightly at high depth settings, and the speed range is judged perfectly. The reverb gels superbly with the dry tone, and as it operates independently of the volume control, you can get a wet-only signal.

To achieve the best results, you have to think of balancing the wet and dry signals rather than merely adding reverb to the dry sound. With the tremolo coming after the reverb, you can max out the reverb and add just a touch of dry signal for definition to get the spookiest atmospherics.

Don't be deceived by the apparently simple controls, because the SST-30 is by far the most versatile Swart we have tried. The complex and endlessly intriguing harmonics that we have come to expect from Swart are all there, but the vast gain range and outstanding master feature make this a rare example of a modern boutique amp that really can do it all.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Typically complex Swart tone
+ Massive gain range
+ Superb touch response
+ Outstanding build quality
+ Stunning reverb and tremolo

– Flimsy hi/lo switch

The most versatile Swart we have tried so far for home, studio and stage use

9/10

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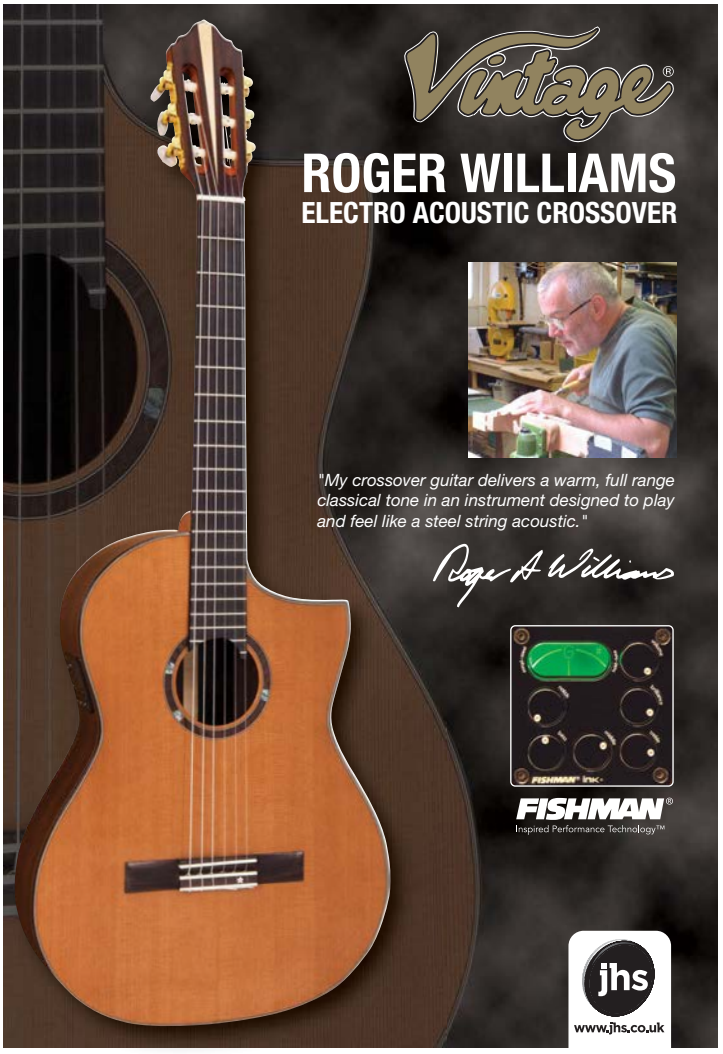

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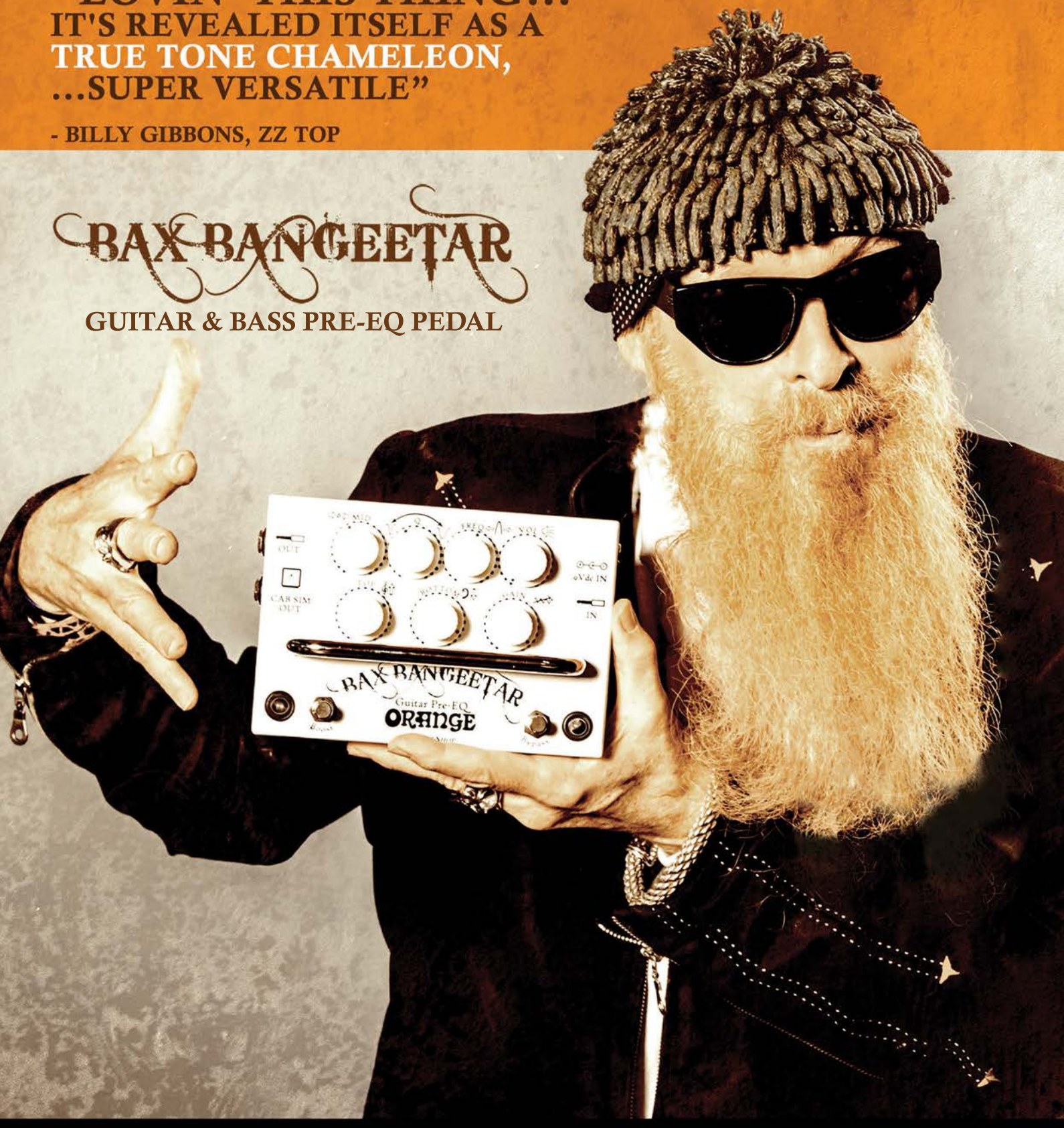

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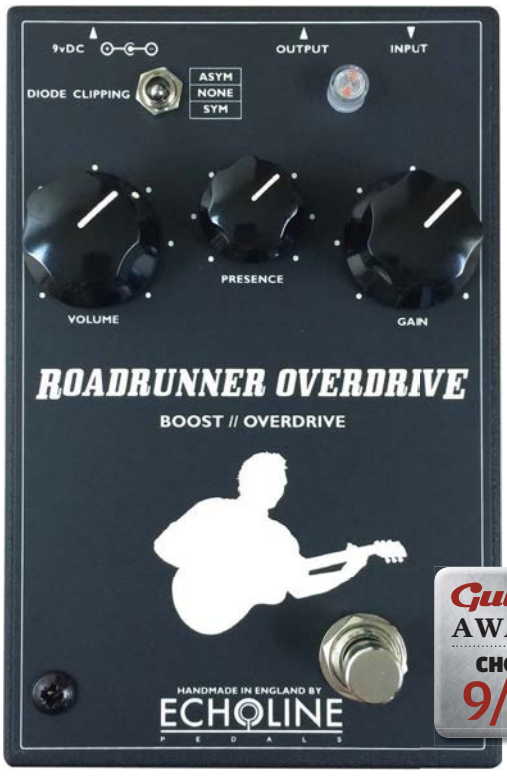

Echoline Roadrunner Overdrive & Germanium Drive

Are you still searching for the daddy of drive pedals? **MARCUS LEADLEY** checks out the latest hand-built British contenders

Echoline Pedals is a relatively new venture for Andy Eales – something of a labour of love for an English luthier with a passion for drive pedals. The concept of the Roadrunner Overdrive emerged back in 2009. Early models were built mostly for friends and the electronics were squeezed into the company's standard small MXR-style enclosure.

The pedal gained a good reputation, but rather than take up an offer to develop the unit into a mass-market product, Eales decided to go in a completely different direction. Today's Roadrunner is an entirely handmade unit built using the highest-quality components. While Eales is responsible for the Roadrunner's circuit, his colleague Steve Howard designed the Echoline Germanium and Silicon Drive pedals.

Roadrunner Overdrive

Like all Echoline pedals, the Roadrunner is housed in a compact (144x94x50mm) enclosure. It's a fairly common, though less familiar, size and its stable construction means it won't flip over and follow you around the stage. The jack sockets and nine-volt DC power port are top-mounted so, when cabled up, the Roadrunner takes up around the same amount of space on a board as a standard Boss pedal. There's no nine-volt battery option, so there's no reason to open up the pedal – indeed, it's sealed with paper tags and breaking these voids the generous three-year warranty. Having seen inside the review unit, we can attest to the quality of the components (including full-sized Alpha pots) and assembly – and the fact that the circuit board has been spray-painted to help preserve its secrets!

The Roadrunner's pots feel great and the sharp click of the stomp switch lights a bright pink LED. With the diode clipping mini-toggle set to normal (diodes out of circuit), the volume at 10 o'clock, presence at about 12 and gain a bit below nine, you get an output extremely similar to the basic character of your setup. However, the Roadrunner is not 'transparent' (in Eales' opinion, no circuit ever truly is) and the design is tweaked to excite the core guitar/amp sound in a musical way – this is one of those pedals that many players (Brinsley Schwarz for example) never turn off, so it becomes a core element of their sound.

This is one of those pedals that many players never turn off, so it becomes a core element of their sound

The Roadrunner doesn't have to add gain, so it essentially conditions your sound. And how does it sound? By way of a slightly unusual analogy, it has an effect a bit like cleaning your windows: the view is the same, but everything seems a little more focused and clear. Psycho-acoustically, the sound >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Roadrunner

The **Klon KTR Professional Overdrive £289** is a contemporary alternative to the legendary Centaur. The **Amptweaker TightDrive £259** is designed to deliver both clean boost and seriously overdriven tones, with lots of flexibility and tone-shaping potential. The **Fulltone Full-Drive 3 £215** is a switchable boost/overdrive with three-position clipping toggle for a wide range of drive and tonal characteristics.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Germanium Drive

The **Keeley Red Dirt Germanium Overdrive £199** has gain, tone and level controls and delivers great vintage sounds. **EarthQuaker Devices Bows £165** is a germanium overdrive with switchable treble/full-range boost. **Tortenmann TA-100 Overdrive €249** boasts germanium diodes and German engineering and is so cool the box isn't even painted.

The Roadrunner's diode clipping mini-toggle switch

The Roadrunner delivers a focused, clear boost

The Germanium Drive is an edgy dirtbox with bags of harmonics

appears to come forward to occupy the space immediately in front of the speaker cones rather than residing on their surface. There's no obvious compression effect, but there is an appealing evenness and clarity.

The fun really begins, though, when you start to tweak the gain control; the increment between 9 o'clock and 12 is incredibly smooth sounding. You get near-total control over the breakup zone's characteristic and you can work the playing dynamics beautifully.

Beyond 12 o'clock, the overdriven tone really starts to kick in. It hits a sweet spot between 12 and 2, where it delivers beautiful, classic electric blues/rock/glam/boogie voices. While adding gain results in a volume hike, this can be reined in with the volume control without any loss of tone or character.

Maxing out the gain control gives you a killer lead voice with bags of character. The presence control works with the exciting top-end frequencies, and it isn't the boost/cut variety – this is pure boost, so it adds a bit more gain when you get into the upper registers – and there are some searing lead sounds to be had. If you want to knock back the tone, the Roadrunner functions well with the guitar's onboard tone controls.

Adding the clipping diodes into the circuit adds compression, and with compression comes a loss of dynamics, which can manifest itself as a reduction in volume. This isn't an issue in the studio (where this option excels as a tone/character-shaping utility), and live players can compensate with the volume control. To clip the signal, you essentially make it 'bigger' using the the gain control, and then the volume control can be used like a master volume. Arguably, this is more of a natural clip on the signal. If you don't drive it too much, that's where the pedal operates at its sweetest and most organic sounding. The Asymmetric setting is a little chewier with a softer top end. Symmetrical is slightly more dynamic, with a little added brightness in the top end. Both options make the gain control feel more aggressive, and the early onset of breakup is ideal for crunch chords and lead voices of diverse character.

Germanium Drive

This is a pedal to stamp on when you want to let your audience know you're serious! Even at its minimum gain setting, there is an edge of drive. It's subtle at this point, but it gives the clear impression that what it really wants is to be unleashed. Sure enough, tweaking the gain control brings on big smiles; it's a rock monster and it will take you to places where the Roadrunner fears to tread.

As the name suggests, the Germanium Drive uses germanium diodes to clip the sound for a vintage-style flavour with lots of natural harmonics. It's not designed to give you the tight heavy metal sounds that its sister the Silicon Drive excels at – overall, it has more of a 70s-style rock sound. Keeping the gain down allows for plenty of manipulation using the guitar's onboard controls, so flicking through pickup options allows you to achieve glassy highs or smooth crying-tone mids. The Germanium Drive's tone control hits neutral at around 12 o'clock. It's a well-designed tool that's very subtle and musical in operation. The overall circuit is built around a central four-gain stage concept and Eales says that it functions very much like an amp, using the transistor stages in a similar way. The pedal has a buffered bypass (the Roadrunner is true bypass), so there's no switching noise with high-gain settings.

KEY FEATURES

Roadrunner Overdrive

- **PRICE** £195
- **DESCRIPTION** Boost/overdrive pedal with optional diode clipping.
- **CONTROLS** Volume, presence, drive. Normal, Symmetrical and Asymmetrical settings (on mini-toggle switch)
- **FEATURES** True-bypass design. 9V power adaptor required (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 144x94x50mm
- **CONTACT** echolinepedals.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent build quality
+ Superb drive/tone flexibility
+ A fair price

- Large footprint may be an issue

It's hard not to like this pedal; it's well built, sweetens your sound and delivers controllable overdrive as and when you need it

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Germanium Drive

- **PRICE** £195
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive/distortion pedal utilising Germanium diode clipping.
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone and drive
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass design. 9V power adaptor required (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 144x94x50mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Classic sound with a 70s flavour
+ Great build quality
+ Loads of flexibility

- Large footprint may be an issue
- Not for scooped metal fans

If you love classic-rock tones, this is a great option. It looks a bit like a brick and is just as solid-sounding

9/10

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EarthQuaker Devices Transmisser

This new stompbox for sonic explorers combines reverb with spacy filter sounds. **GARY WALKER** prepares for blast-off

From humble beginnings in a basement in Akron, Ohio, EarthQuaker Devices has quickly become one of the most talked about names in the stompbox universe. It all started with the Hoof fuzz, and in the 12 years since, the US company's range has swelled to more than 40 pedals.

EarthQuaker's handmade effects are springing up on the boards of bands all over the world, and many guitarists have confessed to us their love of the brand this year. Jimmy Smith of Foals uses the bonkers yet brilliant Rainbow Machine, and *G&B* Test Pilot Paul Gregory of Lanterns On The Lake has fallen for the ethereal delay and reverb charms of the Avalanche Run. Those beardy hipsters beavering away down by the Cuyahoga River have been making a big impression...

Earthquaker already offers several very good reverb pedals, so you might wonder what's new about the Transmisser. It's described as a modulated reverb with extra-long decay fed to a highly resonant filter, that is "the sonic recreation of blowing your signal to bits, shooting it through a black hole then beaming it back down on a cloud of cosmic dust". Far out man. What it isn't is an 'authentic'-sounding pedal that delivers vintage amp-style splashy spring or studiously recreated room or hall reverbs. This is a stombpox for musical adventurers, hellbent on creating otherworldly soundscapes.

In use

The Transmisser's compact sparkly enclosure has six controls – decay sets the length of the reverb trails, darkness equals tone and freq governs the frequency of the low-pass filter – which can also be controlled by an expression pedal. Warp is a 'system slew' control, affecting the resonance and depth of the filter. Rate controls the speed of the modulation and mix dictates the ratio of the wet and dry signals.

Refreshingly for a pedal with so many creative sounds onboard, operating the Transmisser is not a space flight that will require a degree in physics. The manual is a single A5 sheet, and after a quick read we were up and running. That being said, it's a pedal that rewards tweaking – there's an art to matching the frequency control to the key you're playing in, for example.

Turning the frequency all the way anti-clockwise and keeping the mix control below noon produces beautiful ambient pads that will delight soundscapers and post-rock players; crank the frequency clockwise and you get a howling solar-wind sound. Turning up the warp control, meanwhile, yields the gargly tones of a cranked chorus. The darkness control is usable throughout its full sweep, and the voicing doesn't get muddy or shrill at either extremity. The rate knob on our review model was rather sticky; that aside, we preferred the ambient sounds in the first half of its clockwise sweep, although it can also produce ballpark rotary speaker effects, and fully wound with the mix up it's like an alien ray gun. Add in an EBow and you get the sound of a field of chirping extraterrestrial cicadas – if that happens to be your cup of tea...

Some really cool effects can be had by turning the freq and rate controls while playing, resulting in a spacy whoosh; but without an expression pedal or incredibly deft foot control, it's difficult to execute. It's also a little frustrating that there's no separate control for the reverb – the fact that it can't be isolated from the filter effect means the Transmisser is unlikely to work as your main or only reverb pedal.

We had a great time combining the Transmisser with a looper, laying down clean chords and Bigsby bends underpinned with a swirling pad, then dialling the mix right back and kicking in some drive to solo over the top. It's a whole load of insane intergalactic fun, and belies the seeming simplicity of its humble dimensions and six controls. Mission accomplished, EarthQuaker.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Brilliant tool for ambient soundscapes
+ Crams a lot of otherworldly sounds into a small footprint
+ Simple to master

- Expression pedal may be necessary to exploit full functionality
- No independent reverb controls
- Quite expensive for a niche effect

A fun, highly creative pedal, but one that won't suit all reverb tastes

8/10

KEY FEATURES

EarthQuaker Devices Transmisser

- **PRICE** £219
- **DESCRIPTION** Modulated reverb pedal with resonant filter
- **CONTROLS** Decay, darkness, freq, warp, rate, mix
- **FEATURES** Powered by 9-volt DC power supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 117x63x57mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 6574 8228 **earthquakerdevices.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

We're big fans of the **Old Blood Noise Endeavors Procession £199**, which offers reverb with filter, flange and tremolo sounds. The **Boss TE-2 Tera Echo £145** combines delay with reverb and filter, and the **Electro-Harmonix Micro Q-Tron £89** is an envelope filter that delivers wah-like effects.

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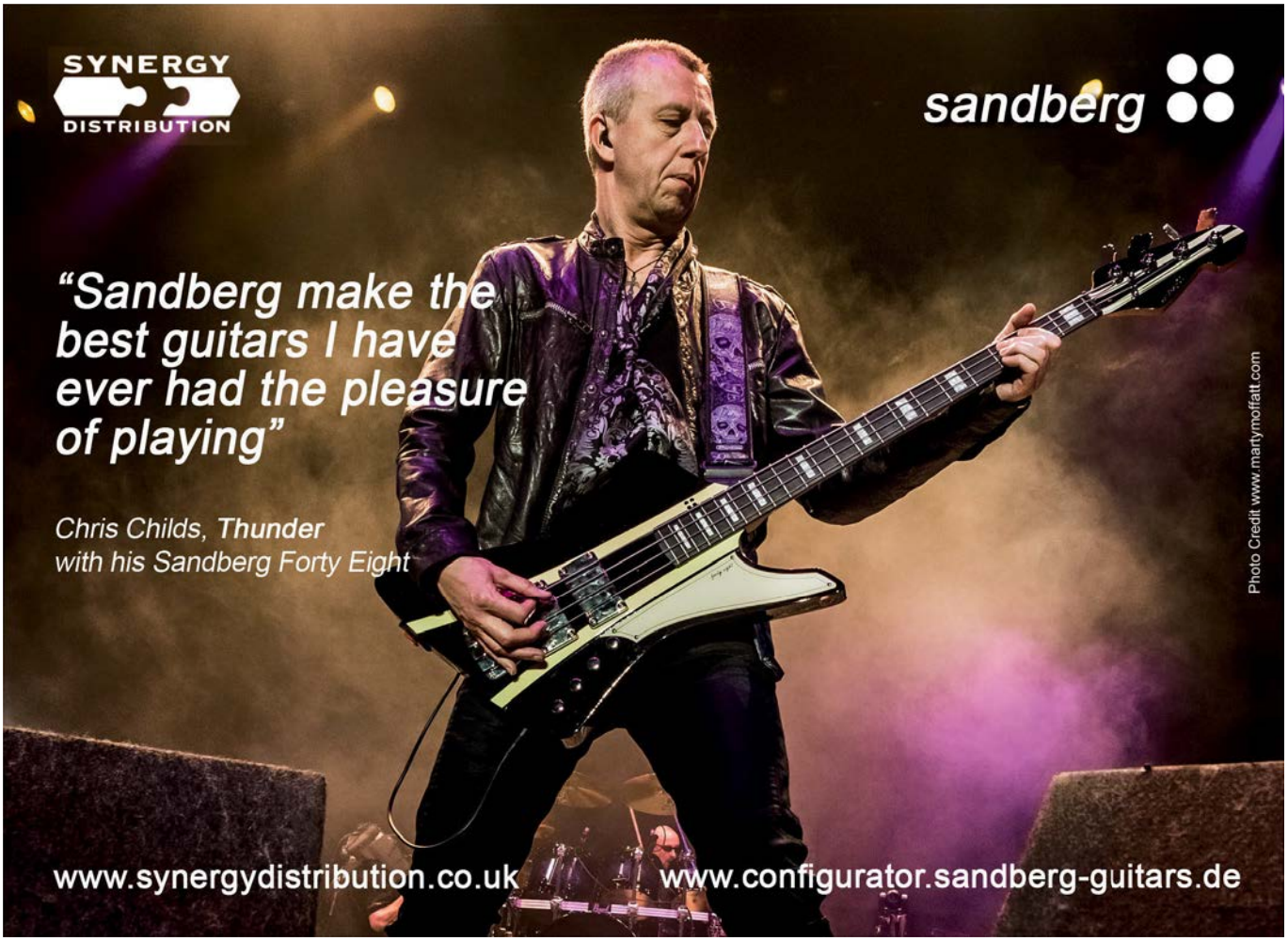
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Tyson Tone Pickups

Bob Tyson couldn't find any replicas that sounded like vintage PAFs and P-90s, so he made his own. **HUW PRICE** puts two sets to the test while attempting to avoid the words 'punchy' and 'bite'...

As a guitar player, Bob Tyson struggled for years with 'close, but no cigar' pickups. Encounters with vintage PAFs and P-90s had opened his ears to the real deal but only made matters worse. Gradually, he became adept at repairing amps and guitars, then one day a client asked Tyson to fix a broken humbucker. It turned out well and the penny dropped. Tyson realised that since he couldn't buy pickups with the tone he wanted, he would instead figure out how to make them himself.

TTL-1 PAF Set

The intricacies of the PAF were once the stuff of arcane mystery. These days, the raw ingredients are common knowledge, and no serious PAF replica builder would dare deviate from the prescribed recipe. That means Tyson Tone's unpotted PAF replicas feature butyrate bobbins, maple spacers, 42AWG plain enamel wire and rough-cast alnico magnets charged to vintage-correct levels.

Then it gets more interesting, because Bob Tyson winds his coils using a vintage mechanical auto traverse coil winder, just as Gibson did. The TTL1 set isn't Tyson's 'coolest' PAF pairing – the neck and bridge are wound to 7.4k and 8k respectively with A2 and A4 magnets and the neck pickup is slightly mellower than the bridge.

In use

The TTL-1s have authentic PAF tone and response in spades, they're extremely touch sensitive, pleasingly microphonic without being squealy and you can turn down your volume controls without losing treble or clarity. Those are all the PAF boxes ticked with aplomb.

This set has authentic PAF tone and response in spades – extremely touch sensitive and pleasingly microphonic

We had a couple of other PAF replica sets on hand for reference, and the results are rather illuminating: compared to a set of Gibson Custom Buckers, changing over to the Tysons sounds as if the proverbial blanket has been removed from the amp. The upper-mids and treble open right out and there is a far wider range of tonal characteristics between the two pickups.

The Custom Buckers have a thick and syrupy quality that many players will appreciate. The TTL-1s are also very full-sounding, but the dramatically extended upper-frequency range allows a lot more detail to come through, which makes the TTL-1s a far more versatile choice.

Although the Tysons are brighter, they're also sweeter and less gritty than the Gibsons. The bridge delights with an expressively wiry voicing and the neck sustains sweetly with a discernibly vocal 'ahh'. The in-between setting is also very distinctive, with slightly hollower mids and a hint of phasiness.

The Tysons sound more vintage-authentic than the Custom Buckers, which is exactly what one should demand and expect from a fairly costly

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

TTL-1 PAF Set

The Tysons punch their weight with **Monty's PAFs** **£216**, **Stephens Designs PG HD/59s** **$650**, **Ron Ellis LRPs** **$600** and **Throbak KZ-115s** **$549**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

P90 Set 53-Wraptail

Mojo Pickups' 50s-voiced **Soapbar Underwound** set **£120** is available with A3 or A5 magnets and optional relic'ing. The **Vintage P90 Soapbar** set **£240** from **Shed Pickups** has vintage-spec parts and few can match the standard of relic'ing.

set of hand-made pickups. So a fairer and more revealing test is to compare them with our benchmark set of Monty's.

This turned out to be a very close-run thing. The Monty's are very slightly brighter and perhaps a bit more touch sensitive, but the Tysons counter with a throatier and rockier midrange thrust that totally nails classic Jimmy Page Les Paul tone.

The Monty's pickups offer a bit more versatility, especially in cleaner country and jazz realms, and they provide a tad more breathy sustain. However, if you rely on humbuckers primarily for blues and classic rock, the TTL1-s could be your preferred option, and their clean tones will still put most humbuckers in the shade.

We've found that some vintage Les Pauls, combined with a cranked-up amp, can feel not unlike a microphone with strings. You have only to touch the body lightly to send a signal through the amp. It's an exhilarating thing to experience, but the very best PAF replicas are capable of making a modern guitar do the same thing. The Tyson TTL-1s certainly do.

P90 SET 53-Wraptail

Tyson makes three varieties of P-90 with various degrees of heat. Still suffering withdrawal symptoms a year after returning the '54 Goldtop we featured (*G&B* November 2015) to its owner, we opted for Tyson's lowest-wind early-50s style set.

The bridge and neck are wound to approximately 7.7k and 7k respectively, with selected rough-cast A4 magnets in the bridge unit and A3 in the neck. As you'd expect with proper replicas, Tyson has used 42AWG plain enamel wire and unpotted coils, and the magnets are individually charged to the same levels he has found in the best-sounding originals.

In use

Sometimes, you just know pickups are right the moment you plug in a hitherto unremarkable guitar to find it has taken a massive leap into the serious tone zone. That's exactly what happens when the 53-Wraptail set is installed in a Gibson Les Paul Studio 60s tribute. So what sort of P-90s are these? Are they snarly and growly or the sweet and delicate kind? Do they do honking blues roar or woody jazziness? The answer is all of the above.

In clean mode, the bridge is bright and shimmery, but a broad frequency lift in the upper-mids contributes bite, along with a convincingly vintage quack and a tendency towards twang on the wound strings. These characteristics can be emphasised or diminished depending on where you pick the strings.

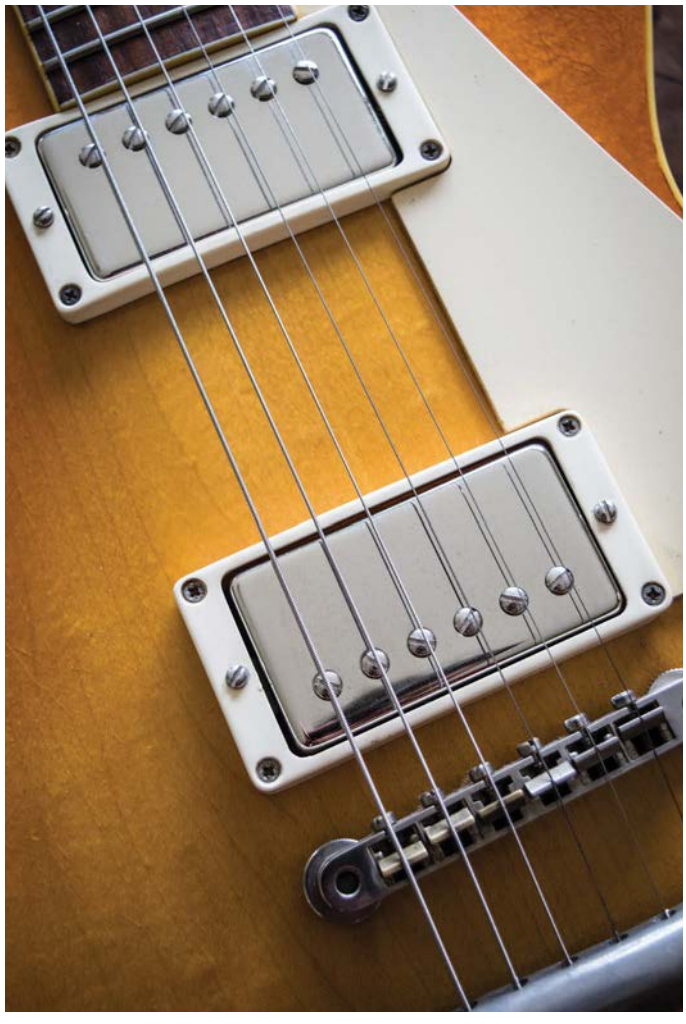
In clean mode, the bridge is bright and shimmery, but a broad frequency lift in the upper-mids contributes bite

When piling on the gain, the bite never becomes edgy, but instead it lends a precise attack that's articulate and defined. The quack becomes a growl and powerchords are drenched in harmonics. Best of all, the punchy and powerful bass retains clarity and balances flawlessly with singing high notes that sustain and bloom.

The neck pickup is sweeter still, with a more rounded and fluty tonality. Hi-fi clarity combines with extreme sensitivity, but it's just as loud and powerful as the bridge, and the middle position has an almost hollowbody-like jangle and chime.

We went looking for Gilmour and Freddie King tones, and weren't disappointed. We also found jazz, country, funk and contemporary heavy-rock tones along the way. Inevitably, then, our Goldtop GAS has taken a turn for the worse. Will it never end?

In our view, the very best vintage-style aftermarket pickups achieve two things. Firstly, they improve on stock pickups by providing more sonic character, dynamic responsiveness and tonal range. Secondly, and perhaps more crucially, they are able to wrench out more of a guitar's natural resonance and enhance it in a way that fuses the acoustic and electric aspects of the instrument.

In other words, they emulate precisely those elusive characteristics of the 50s and 60s originals that make them so special and desirable. Both these Tyson sets achieve exactly that – and then some.

KEY FEATURES

TTL-1 PAF Set

- **PRICE** $325
- **DESCRIPTION** PAF replica humbuckers, made in USA
- **SPECS** 42AWG plain enamel magnet wire, A4 and A2 magnets, butyrate bobbins, no wax potting, 7.4k and 8k DC resistance
- **CONTACT** Tyson Tone Pickups 001 831 776 8692 **www.tysontone.com**

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Clear tone and extended treble
+ Extremely touch dynamic
+ Superb clean-up capability

- Not quite as airy as some alternative options

A low/medium-output PAF replica set that's among the very best examples we've tried

9/10

KEY FEATURES

P90 SET 53-Wraptail

- **PRICE** $210
- **DESCRIPTION** Mid-50s style P-90 replicas, made in USA
- **SPECS** 42AWG plain enamel magnet wire, A3 and A4 magnets, no wax potting, 7k and 7.7k DC resistance, select alloy steel pole screws and keeper bars

Guitar & Bass AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Versatile, characterful tones
+ Super-clear with sweet treble
+ Highly touch dynamic
+ Cleans up beautifully

- Less aggressive and bright than late-50s spec

Incredible mid-50s P-90 replicas that hold their own with the genuine article

10/10

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Towner Down Tension Bar

Armed with a Bigsby B6CB vibrato tailpiece, **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** adds a whammy bar to his ES-335 without drilling the top, thanks to an ingenious solution by Christian James Towner...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
If you want to fit a Bigsby B7 to your ES-335 without drilling holes in its top, another option is the **Vibramate V7-335 Mounting Kit £87**. The kit includes an adhesive-backed 'Custom Made' plate to cover the stud tailpiece holes.

Although it's a piece of hardware that polarises opinion amongst the guitar fraternity almost as readily as artificially aged finishes, for this writer, the Bigsby vibrato is as rock 'n' roll as Keith Richards in a hurricane, and a constant source of musical inspiration. A couple of years of sustained Gretsch (ab)use transformed a Bigsby from a nice-to-have luxury adornment into a must, and the time came to replace the stop-bar on our long-suffering Gibson ES-335 with something altogether more elastic.

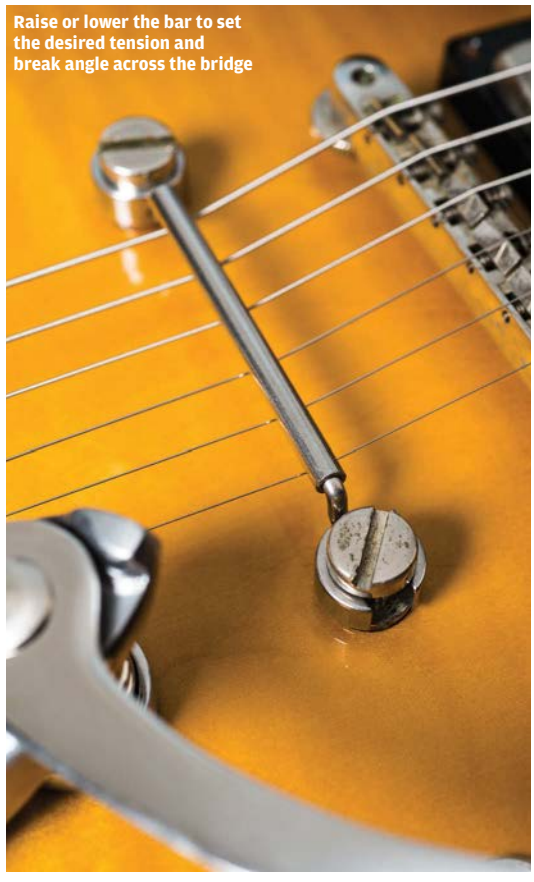
A B7 tailpiece with integrated tension bar was the obvious and most attractive choice, but it seemed a little gung-ho to drill holes in the Gibson's attractive flame-top and leave it irreversibly scarred. At this point, many would have opted for a Vibramate kit, but the ES-335 in question is a little on the heavy side already, so adding additional mass on top of the Bigsby itself didn't seem ideal. Much head-scratching and Googling followed. Was there a way to use a Bigsby such as the B3 or B6 that wouldn't require holes to be drilled in the top, but still maintain an adequate level of tension over the bridge saddles so as to avoid strings jumping out of their notches in the heat of battle?

Thanks to the roller bar, the feel of the Bigsby is smooth, with no perceptible increase in friction

Enter the Towner Down Tension Bar. What is it? Its San Diego-based inventor Christian James Towner takes over the narrative: "I borrowed a friend's guitar, for about a year, and couldn't let go. I finally scraped up enough cash to buy a Gibson ES-335 Dot, and shortly after began thinking about installing a Bigsby, simply because I am attracted to the way you can expand the voice of the guitar with the Bigsby vibrato system.

"I was looking into the installation and I spoke to a guitar tech. They mentioned installing the Bigsby B3 instead of the B7. This would relieve me from having to drill extra holes in the top of the guitar body. I took their advice, which seemed logical, and installed the Bigsby B3.

"Soon after I set up the guitar and began playing, the strings fell off the bridge... the answer came to me immediately because I have a habit of making use of what I already have before asking questions or just



Raise or lower the bar to set the desired tension and break angle across the bridge

throwing money at a challenge. Simply because, most of the time I didn't have much money to begin with. So, in that moment, I wondered if there was a bar to retrofit to the stop tailpiece studs, looked around for one and found nothing. I was very surprised.

"I went around to a machine shop and began fabrication, making my first Down Tension Bar. I installed the first prototype and it did exactly what I needed it to do, keeping the strings in place. From there, I finessed the shape and width.

It wasn't just keeping the strings in place, Towner found that there were other benefits: "It allows the guitar player to decide how much downward tension they want over their guitar strings and it allows you to raise and/or lower the bar equally or unequally via the stop tailpiece's studs."

In use

Regular Bigsby B3 and B6 hinge plates have a slot for strap button access, but it can prove fiddly. The Towner Down Tension Bar is also available with an adaptor that raises the strap button above the slot and negates the need to drill screw holes in the end of the guitar. Our B6CB's hinge plate features a simple screw hole rather than a slot, so with the B6CB installed, the strap button sits on top of the hinge plate and access to it isn't impeded. Small screw holes in the tail of our ES-335 didn't seem as major an issue as drilling the top, so we opted for the simple £26.95 kit containing the stainless steel Down Tension Bar only.

Once the Towner unit is assembled, installation is a breeze. Two pin arms are situated inside either end of a roller bar, and the other ends of the arms connect to anchors that mount onto your guitar's existing tailpiece studs, as long as they measure no more than 6.73mm at the neck. Once the bar is in place, adjust the downward tension it exerts on your strings to taste, *et voilà*, it works as advertised. Our strings now behave much as they would with a regular stop-bar tailpiece and, thanks to the roller bar, the feel of the Bigsby is smooth with no perceptible increase in friction. The look is understated and elegant, too. Highly recommended.

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £26.95 for stainless steel version. Gold version £57.95. £39.95 for stainless steel with hinge plate adaptor or £70.95 in gold with hinge plate adaptor
- **DESCRIPTION** Screwless string-control tension bar device, mounts to existing stop tailpiece studs
- **CONTACT**
  www.townerusa.com
  www.wdmusic.co.uk

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Quick and easy to set up
+ Inexpensive
+ No top-drilling required
+ Stays smooth and in-tune

- Some will still prefer the more vintage-authentic look of a B7

An affordable, easy to install modification that's lighter and less bulky than the competition

9/10

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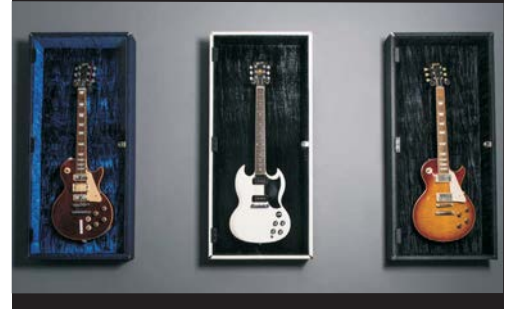

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Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians, and music. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *The Telecaster Guitar Book*, and *History Of The American Guitar*, and his latest is *The Gibson 335 Guitar Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of those great Gibson semi-solids.

THE F-HOLE TRUTH?

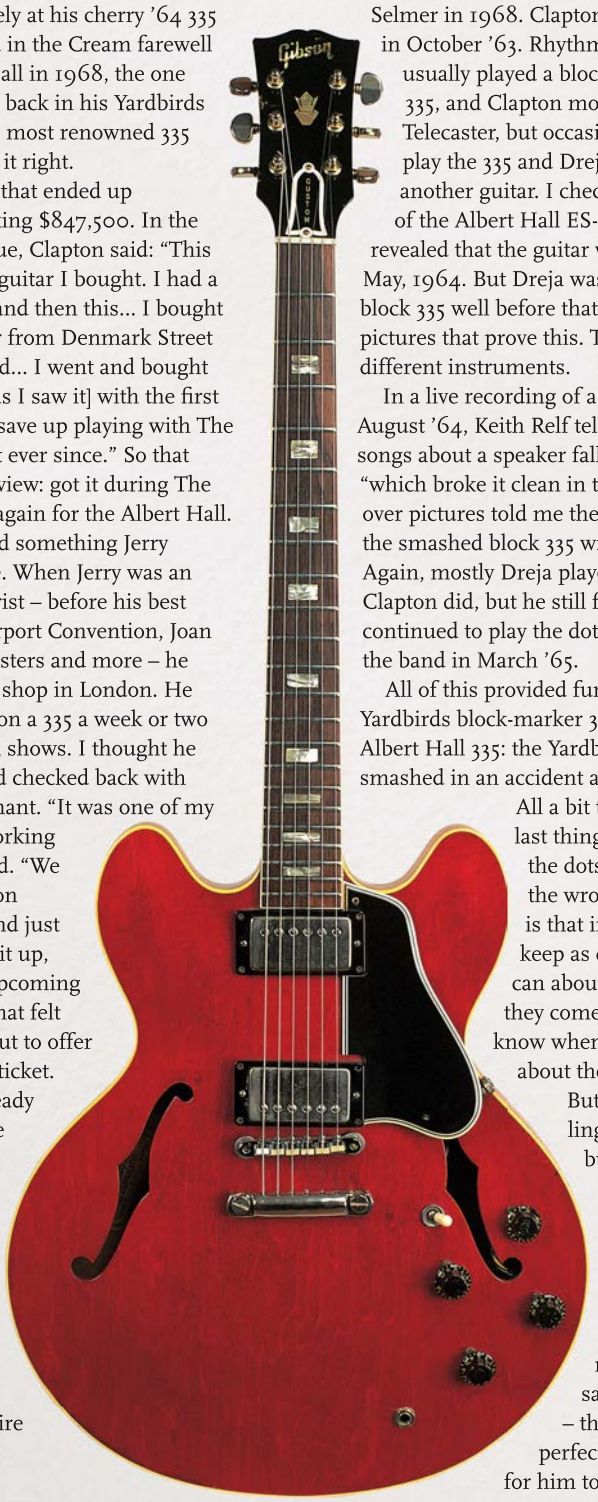
The ES-335 Eric Clapton played at the Albert Hall in 1968 is one of the most famous examples ever made. **TONY BACON** lifts the lid...

I can't blame Eric Clapton for forgetting the details of something that happened so long ago. While researching my new Gibson ES-335 book, I started to look closely at his cherry '64 335 – the one he played in the Cream farewell shows at the Albert Hall in 1968, the one he insisted he bought back in his Yardbirds days. It's arguably the most renowned 335 ever, so I ought to get it right.

It was also a guitar that ended up selling for a breathtaking $847,500. In the 2004 auction catalogue, Clapton said: "This is the second electric guitar I bought. I had a pinky red Telecaster, and then this... I bought this brand new, either from Denmark Street or Charing Cross Road... I went and bought [this] guitar [as soon as I saw it] with the first money I managed to save up playing with The Yardbirds... I've had it ever since." So that became the accepted view: got it during The Yardbirds; dug it out again for the Albert Hall.

Then I remembered something Jerry Donahue had told me. When Jerry was an up-and-coming guitarist – before his best known work with Fairport Convention, Joan Armatrading, Hellecasters and more – he worked at the Selmer shop in London. He told me he sold Clapton a 335 a week or two before the Albert Hall shows. I thought he must be mistaken and checked back with him, but he was adamant. "It was one of my main highlights of working at Selmer's," Jerry said. "We had a nice conversation during the process, and just as we were wrapping it up, Eric mentioned the upcoming shows, in a manner that felt as though he was about to offer me a complimentary ticket. But I told him I'd already bought tickets, and he seemed pleased.

You can imagine my amazement and joy as I sat watching Cream come on to the Albert Hall stage, Eric with the 335 I'd sold him. He played that guitar for the entire evening. I was filled with pride."



It turns out The Yardbirds did have a couple of 335s back in the day, but they have nothing to do with the 'Albert Hall' 335 that Clapton bought at Selmer in 1968. Clapton joined The Yardbirds in October '63. Rhythm guitarist Chris Dreja usually played a block-marker cherry 335, and Clapton mostly his 'pinky red' Telecaster, but occasionally Clapton would play the 335 and Dreja would switch to another guitar. I checked the serial number of the Albert Hall ES-335 with Gibson, and it revealed that the guitar was shipped on 20 May, 1964. But Dreja was playing the Yardbirds block 335 well before that: there are dated pictures that prove this. These are obviously two different instruments.

In a live recording of a Yardbirds gig from August '64, Keith Relf tells a story between songs about a speaker falling on Dreja's guitar "which broke it clean in two". More work poring over pictures told me the band soon replaced the smashed block 335 with a dot-neck model. Again, mostly Dreja played it; sometimes Clapton did, but he still favoured his Tele. Dreja continued to play the dot 335 after Clapton left the band in March '65.

All of this provided further proof that the Yardbirds block-marker 335 couldn't be the Albert Hall 335: the Yardbirds guitar was smashed in an accident and replaced.

All a bit too forensic? Well, the last thing you want to do is join the dots [or blocks? Ed] and see the wrong picture. My advice is that if you're not yet famous, keep as detailed a record as you can about all your guitars as they come and go. You never know when you might get asked about them.

But still one question lingers. Why did Clapton buy a four-year-old guitar, one that either was in the shop a while or was second-hand? "I guess he wouldn't have cared at all whether the 335 was new or not," Donahue said. "He really liked it – the feel, the sound; it was perfect. It took no time at all for him to get his wallet out."

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Vintage TIME MACHINES

1932 NATIONAL TRIOLIAN RESONATOR

This iconic 1930s resonator bears a few battle scars and has been spared a refinish. It's a prime specimen

When it comes to steel-bodied resonator guitars, the original National Triolian is an icon. This particular 1932 example at Greenwoods Music in Liverpool matches the year and look of the Triolian used famously by Rory Gallagher, and exemplifies everything we love about the model.

Produced from 1928 to 1941, the Triolian was built with a wood body for its first two years of production before the switch to steel in 1929. That switch made all the difference; what resulted was a unique, brighter sound and a durable body less vulnerable to climate change, one that produced a gorgeous patina with playing wear. The particular geography of distress across this specimen's body and neck is one of the best we've seen. We are endlessly grateful that the stories written on its body have not been erased with an ill-advised restoration.

The notoriously thin and vulnerable polychrome finishes used on Depression-era Triolians, combined with a galvanised steel surface, led to paint flaking and blistering – a flaw that led to many refinish jobs and precious few completely original specimens. Billed as a step up from its sister model the Duolian, the Triolian still had only a single resonator cone, despite its name. The main differences are in the wood choice for the neck – mahogany for the Duolian, maple for the Triolian – and some small aesthetic changes.

The Triolian had a 12-fret neck until 1935 and a slotted headstock until 1936. Square-back necks for lap playing were offered from 1933 until production ended in 1941. Today, steel-bodied Triolians from the early 30s can fetch well over £3,000 on the open market.

This model is an artifact from a unique period in the history of the National String Instrument Corporation. Founded in Los Angeles by John Dopyera, George Beauchamp, Ted Kleinmeyer and Paul Barth, the original company gave rise to the Dobro Manufacturing Company (formed by Dopyera with his brothers when he left) and ultimately Rickenbacker (formed by Beauchamp and Barth with others).

This specimen was produced just as Dobro and National reunited, though they continued separate production, branding and distribution for some time.

VITAL STATISTICS

1932 National Triolian Resonator

- **PRICE** £3,295
- **YEAR** 1932
- **TYPE** Resonator
- **BUILD** Single-cone in Walnut Burst
- **REVERB SELLER** Greenwoods Music Reverb.com/greenwoods-music
- **SEE MORE** Reverb.com/UK

Vintage BENCH TEST

1936 KALAMAZOO KG-11

The Gibson name may not appear on the headstock, but, as **HUW PRICE** discovers, this beautiful pre-war treasure delivers dry, dusty blues tones to die for

Before Gibson made Epiphone its budget brand, it had Kalamazoo. Named after Gibson's home town in Michigan, Kalamazoo was the brainchild of Gibson president Guy Hart, who needed something to keep Gibson in the musical instrument business through the Great Depression. The Kalamazoo line was revived during the 60s for a series of electric guitars, basses and amplifiers that were a notch below the mid-priced Epiphone-branded products. The revival was short-lived, and lasted only until 1970.

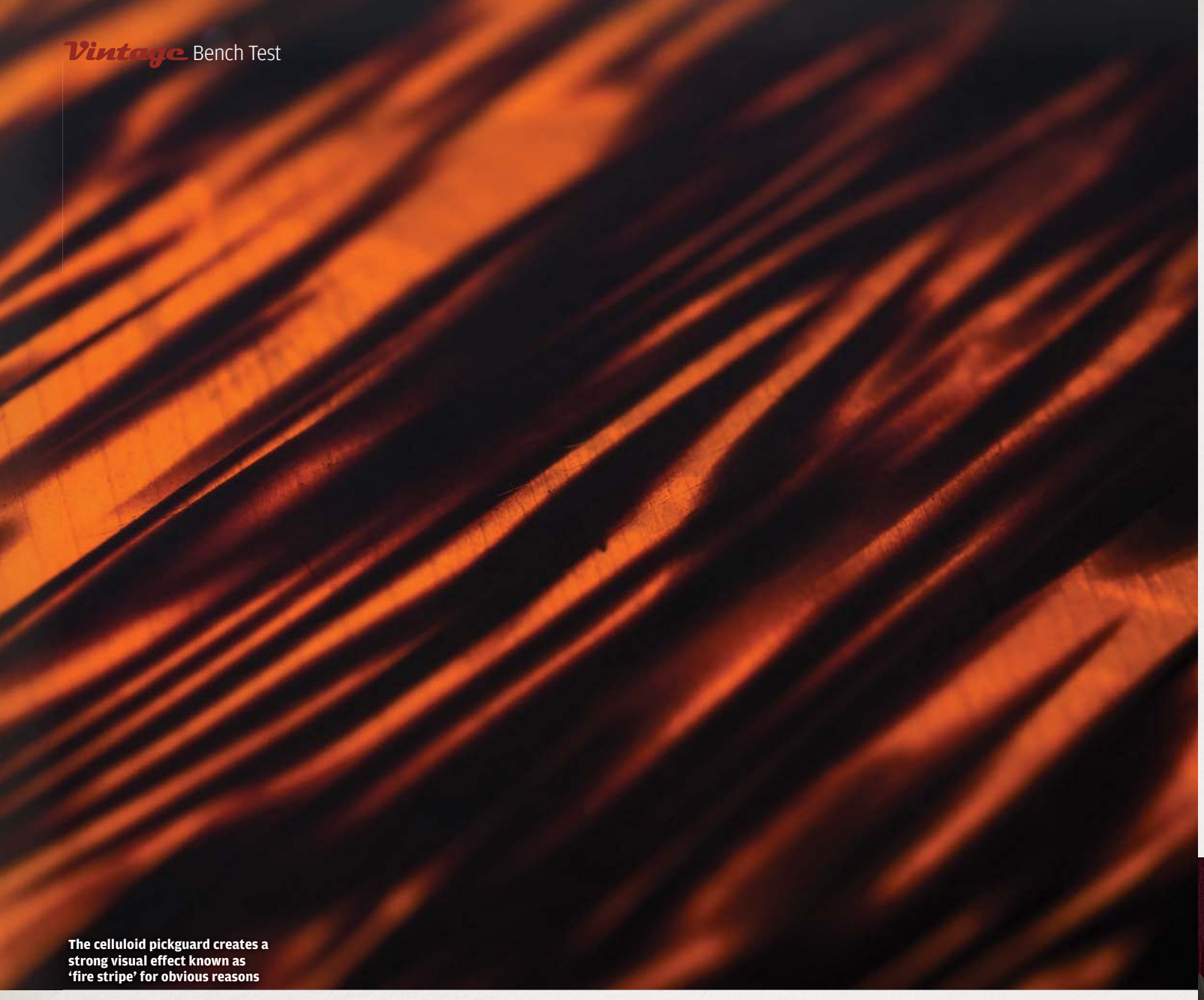
Although there's no label, figuring out the model number of this example wasn't hard. Between 1933 and 1942, there were only a handful of Kalamazoo flat-top acoustics and the small, square-shouldered body marks this one down as a KG-11. Most 'bluesologists' agree Robert Johnson played and recorded with the larger KG-14.

Between 1933 and 1942, there were only a handful of Kalamazoo flat-top acoustics

On the neck block, there's a three-digit number and a letter, with both corresponding to a 1936 manufacturing date – assuming that Kalamazoo and Gibson factory order numbers followed the same system. These guitars also crop up with different brand names, such as Ward and Recording King.

Although it's not officially a Gibson, the KG-11 is undeniably Gibson-like. Sharply-carved headstock >

The logo's fuzzy edges are the result of stencilling



The celluloid pickguard creates a strong visual effect known as 'fire stripe' for obvious reasons

KEY FEATURES

1936 Kalamazoo KG-11

- **PRICE** N/A
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid wood acoustic guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** 3-piece solid spruce top, solid mahogany body, set mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard with pearl dots and 19 frets, rosewood bridge, ebony nut, ebony bridge pins
- **HARDWARE** Unbranded open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 57mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 24mm at first fret, 27mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 39mm at nut, 60.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.4kg/3lbs
- **FINISH** Two-tone sunburst

corners that are parallel to the nut, a pronounced headstock thickness taper, the fire stripe pickguard and the darkly shaded top are all company characteristics, and the three-on-a-plate tuners look the same as those found on Gibsons of the era.

Remarkably, the KG-11 appears to have an all-solid body, too. The back and sides are mahogany and the top is spruce, but the budget giveaway is the fact that it's a three-piece top with a wide-grained centre section and tighter-grained wings. The join lines are hard to spot under the shaded edges and deep-amber middle. Other departures from top-end Gibson spec include ladder bracing rather than X-bracing and the absence of a truss rod.

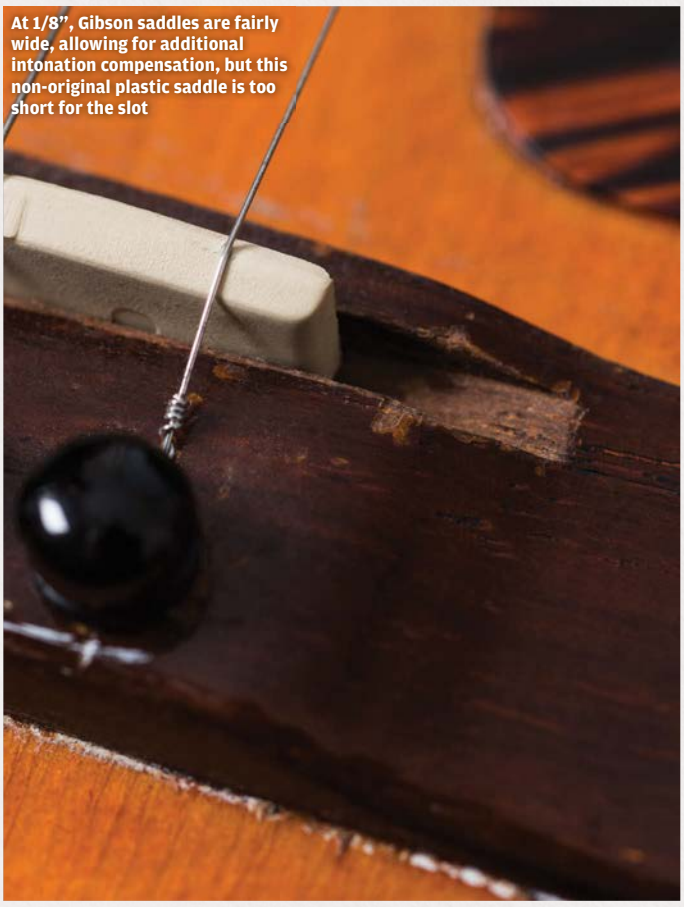
The headstock logo looks like a stencil, and the entire neck – peghead included – is sprayed with dark brown lacquer to match the body. As far as I can tell, the neck has never been re-set, and the joint has held up so well it doesn't even need one. However, the fingerboard – which is undoubtedly original – has been sanded smooth and re-fretted. It looks as if the work has been carried out recently, but the board has a perfect playing surface with a 12-inch radius, and it's an absolutely top-notch fret job.

The budget giveaway is that it's a three-piece top with a wide-grained centre section and tighter-grained wings

Lacquer covers the nut, so it's been there since new, but I can't tell whether it's ebony or rosewood. I would usually assume the former, but in the areas where the lacquer has worn away, the colour is brown enough to raise doubts. At 14.75 inches wide and 17.5 inches long, the body size equates more or less to Martin's 00 and the Gibson Nick Lucas – in size if not in shape.

In use

In the time between the photo-session and the review, the plastic saddle was removed and this KG-11 was treated to a new bone saddle. The effect on the tone was dramatic, with massive increases >



At 1/8", Gibson saddles are fairly wide, allowing for additional intonation compensation, but this non-original plastic saddle is too short for the slot

These original tuners are showing their age, but they still work well enough

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Above **This KG-11 has a neat headstock shape and it's fitted with what appears to be either an ebony or rosewood nut**
Opposite page **The slight irregularity suggests the kerfing was hand-made and the back braces were shaved tall and thin**

in punch, volume and clarity – and the KG-11 was no slouch in those departments to start with. The feel is absolutely vintage because the neck has been left deep for stability without a truss rod, but any potential clubbiness is alleviated by the pronounced V profile.

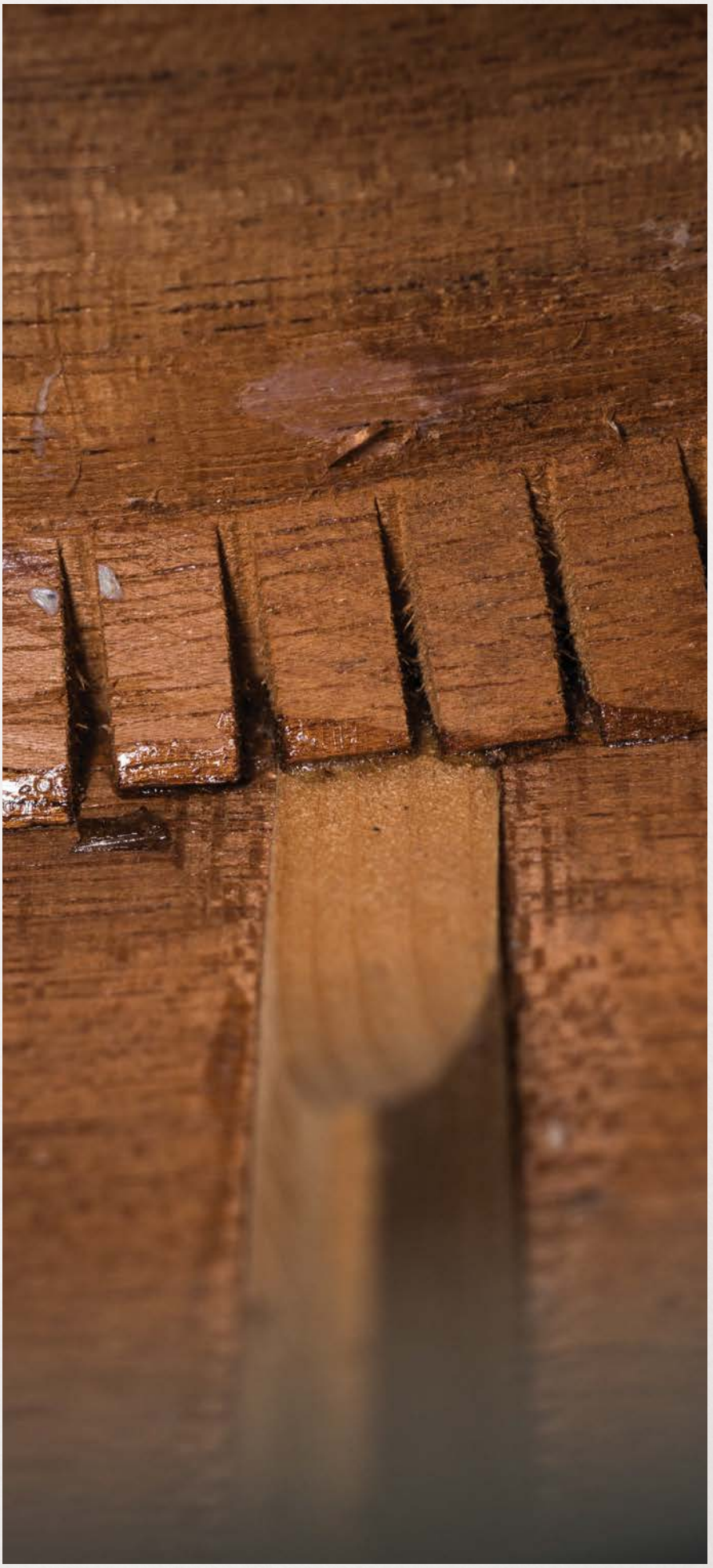
The nut width and string spacing are both wide by modern standards, but it facilitates easy fingerpicking and the 24.75-inch scale length keeps finger stretches to a minimum. The upshot of all of that is this septuagenarian has absolutely no playability issues.

As we'd hoped, the KG-11's tone has the dusty dryness of a pre-war Gibson, that's capable of making even those of us with limited ability sound like authentic blues players. Whether you're picking, strumming or sliding, the KG-11 sounds somehow 'real', with a sweet snarl and barely a trace of boxiness.

Whether you're picking, strumming or sliding, the KG-11 sounds somehow 'real', with a sweet snarl

The bass impresses, considering the small body, and without sounding excessively bright the KG-11 has superb clarity and note definition. The bracing has a strong influence on tone and there's something about the single-note punch that's reminiscent of a small-bodied archtop. However, the flat soundboard and big soundhole contribute a full-frequency spread that responds equally well to a strong right-arm attack or delicate fingerstyle. Perhaps an X-brace would provide a fuller midrange, but the ladder bracing has qualities that more than compensate.

The KG-11 produces what I can only describe as a harmonic reverb effect. It's most apparent as you play single notes, and tones linger on inside the body long after you have let go of the note. Harmonics swell and shift to create a beautiful and somewhat eerie backdrop that is special and inspiring. Perhaps it would be more accurate to call them harmonic 'undertones' rather than overtones.



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Above **Three-ply binding around the soundhole is the extent of the decoration on a KG-11**

If you ever get the chance to try one of these guitars, you should follow Robert Johnson's lead and try playing into a corner with reflective surfaces. It's called corner loading and you'll notice stronger bass, fuller midrange and enhanced detail – a bit like the effect of using a decent-quality studio compressor. In other words, the guitar's tone will improve and you'll be able to hear it better. Actually, this is something you can try with any acoustic guitar, but the smaller ones allow you to get further into the corner to magnify the effect.

The KG-11's tone is so 'old-school' that it is less adept as an all-rounder than the 1939 Gibson L-00 we recently featured in Vintage Bench Test (*G&B* August 2016). However, for rootsy country rhythm, blues and ragtime picking and bottleneck the voicing is perfect, and the 14th-fret neck join makes octave access that little bit easier.

While it's possible to make new electric guitars sound 'vintage' with the right pickups and hardware, there's something about the tone of 70-year-old timber that you can't replicate. Blues enthusiast Simon Butler kindly loaned us this guitar, and it's not for sale, but with prices for KG-11s ranging from £1,000-£1,500, Kalamazoos are still relatively affordable by vintage standards.

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

TOYS OF SUMMERS

The Steve Summers Band released their second album earlier this year. Here, their bandleader gives **LARS MULLEN** an insight into the guitars that make him tick...

Steve Summers has been playing blues guitar since his early teens, inspired by greats such as Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Mike Bloomfield. Blues-rock is at the heart of *Rainmakin'*, the second album he's cut with The Steve Summers Band, but his enviable guitar collection is a diverse one.

"I've had various metal-themed guitars over the years," says Summers as he shows *G&B* around his collection. "Especially when I was performing in that style. Ibanez and Charvel, for example, great guitars that are built for speed with super-fast necks and silky fingerboards.

"I'm gigging a lot in my own band, which is blues-rock based and, of course, when the crowd are making a noise you know it's okay to throw in some fast runs here and there. I think they expect that, and the guitars that I gig with are set up to suit.

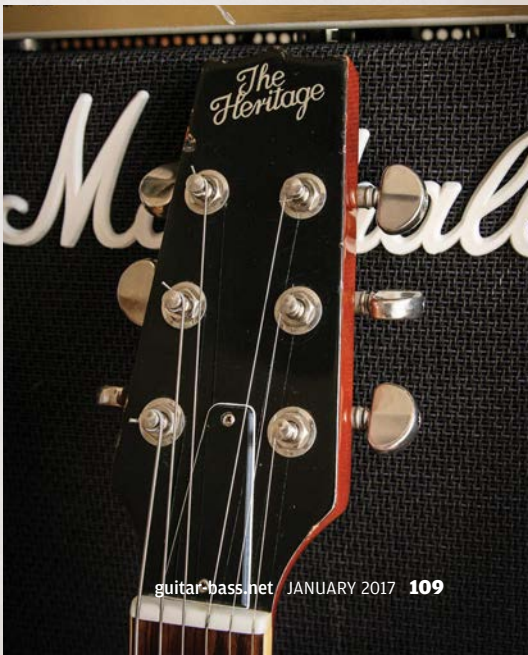
"For recording, though, I'd rather have a more subtle approach. Too much fast playing, for me at least, would be like having a wah on every track. I feel it's important for solos to be melodic, have feeling and tell a story.

"I've always gone back to my first love for rocky blues, especially from the late 60s and into the 70s. Being what we call 'old-school' from that period, I had always felt that old was best when it came to guitars, and although I couldn't afford an original, I settled on a Gibson Custom '59 Les Paul VOS in Iced Tea Burst, which is just three years old.

"I've always gone back to my love for rocky blues, especially from the late 60s and into the 70s"

"They've done a great job, as it really does look like the genuine article with nickel hardware and very slight wear. It's like a guitar that has hardly been played and well looked after. Whilst I've >

Above **Steve Summers at home with his guitar collection**
Opposite page, main image **Summers holding his Fender Montara**
Top right **Iced Tea Burst Gibson Custom '59 Les Paul VOS**
Middle and bottom right **Heritage H-150**
Bottom left **Gibson ES-335**
Bottom centre **PRS SE Singlecut and 1980s Japanese Contemporary Series Strat**



Main image **Candy Apple Red Jazzmaster (left), American Standard Telecaster**
Top left **Standard Stratocaster HSS (left), Mexican Standard Strat**
Above left **Headstock detail on Summers' Japanese Contemporary Strat**

always loved humbuckers for lead, I find them just a little too ballsy for chord work in The Steve Summers Band, as we are blues based.

"Not long ago, I had the opportunity to try out a Heritage H-150, which was built in 2003 at the old Gibson Kalamazoo factory by the original Gibson luthiers with hand-wound humbuckers by Rendell Wall. These are on the earlier models, as opposed to Seymour Duncan on the current ones.

"It didn't take long to realise it was all I'd ever wanted in an electric guitar, combining all the best points I consider from PRS, Gibson and Fender. It's currently my first choice for live work and a main contender in the studio. I've ordered a Stetsbar vibrato for the H-150 and recently had a six-way selector switch from JJ Custom Works installed by Mick 'Geordie' Johnson at Mick Johnson Guitars, down in Reading. This offers a variety of inner and outer coil-switching permutations in series or parallel. Literally by the flick of a switch, I can go from a tubular Tele sound to a full-on humbucker and most things in between, clean or overdriven.

"I certainly wouldn't be without either of these two guitars, and I'm not doing an A and B test, both are unique in their own right. The Gibson neck is amazing, and I think visually it's the most beautiful guitar I've ever seen. Both sound amazing through all my amps, including the Marshall and Mesa/Boogie. I used a Marshall JVM combo on my latest album, but I adore my Mesa 5:25 Express and 5:50 combos.

"It didn't take long to realise the Heritage H-150 was all I'd ever wanted in an electric guitar"

"As it turns out, the best neck in my collection is on my Gibson ES-335. I feel the body is just a little large for me, but it was by accident that I bought it. I was in Andertons Music in Guildford buying a guitar for my son and it was looking at me. I think we all know that it's fatal to even think about trying a cool guitar in a shop just for kicks, but that neck... oh. I can still recall the surge of adrenaline when I tried it. I wasn't going through a financially flash period by any means and I didn't entertain

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the thought of going without food, I just bought it. Cherry Red with dots also did it for me."

Whilst a big fan of humbuckers, Summers is also a single-coil devotee, as he explains: "We all have our single-coil heroes, and I have so many: Hank, Jimi, Rory, Stevie Ray, where do I stop? I've been a Robin Trower fan from day one, right up to the present day. That Strat sound with a Uni-Vibe is so sweet. I heard his solo on *Simple Sister* from the [Procol Harum] *Broken Barricades* album in '71 and he really stood out as a cool player. His own band and albums that followed became another milestone in Strat playing for so many players. I've covered a few of his songs on my albums, including *Too Rolling Stoned*, also using a Uni-Vibe.

"I still have my first [Contemporary Series] Strat, built in Japan, which more or less falls into the Super Strat era from the mid-80s. I'm not sure of the exact model – it was built for speed with a slim neck, locking nut, Floyd-Rose style vibrato and a humbucker at the bridge. I've played this one a lot over the years, having rocked it up even further with Kent Armstrong high-output Rainbow pickups.

"I rarely use the treble pickup on a straightforward Strat, always the neck and middle – normally out of phase. If I want the lead sound, it has to be a humbucker, hence the HSS format is ideal for me.

"I've got another HSS Fender, a Standard Strat. That's a lovely guitar, with quality woods and hardware. I used that guitar on *Second Hand Blues* on *Rainmakin'*. That guitar also has a mini push switch that bypasses the internal wiring and sends the signal direct to the output. There's a hell of a lift there for solos.

"I have a nice Mexican Standard Strat that I've loaded with Texas Specials. It looks and plays as good as the rest – well, now it does... the neck had started to warp and in no time was unplayable, and I couldn't get it back. I was told by some of the top shops nothing could be done, except buying a new neck. Again, Mick 'Geordie' Johnson came to the rescue. If he can't fix things, they're not worth fixing. He's worked for so many players, from Hank Marvin to James Burton. Mick removed the fingerboard, straightened the neck and re-attached the board – amazing.

"I do admit to having a love for certain jazz styles, especially the funky stuff. I have DiMarzios fitted to my Jazzmaster, looking cool in Candy Apple Red. The neck pickup, played clean, has some gorgeous smooth jazz overtones. I loved the sound Joe >

Main image **Di Giorgio acoustic (left), nylon-string Takamine CP132S**
Top left **Nylon-string Spanish Cuenca 70C (left), Spanish guitar built by luthier RE Spain**
Above left **Taylor GS Mini (left), Eko Ranger**

Above **Gretsch G5034TFT Rancher electro-acoustic**

Pass used to get from a Jazzmaster in the early 60s. We all dote on old vintage models, especially Telecasters, and who is to say what sounds, looks or plays best? All I can say is I'd be lost be without my American Standard Telecaster. It's another I wouldn't part with. I use it live for slide and nearly all the rhythm tracks in the studio. I bought it in London's Rock Around The Clock, I was just buying my son a small practice amp and of course came out with another guitar. My son has a lot to answer for, bless him.

"If I want slide with a little more bite, I'll use my Dean Resonator Chrome. Dean are known primarily for metal-sounding guitars, and this one has a metal body of course, but whilst it can rock out, there's a really warm sound happening."

Summers has a few tasty acoustics in his collection, too. "I have several, which to me are all unique in their own way," he says, "from my small-bodied Taylor GS Mini to my faithful Eko Ranger jumbo. I read that up to 200,000 models were built during the late 60s and 70s and sold under various names, like Eros, in six- and 12-string format. This Santa Cruz OM Grand falls into the high-end category and is the first guitar I turn to for all acoustic work and writing. Like most of my flat-tops, I have it strung with standard electric strings, there's hardly any loss of volume or tone.

"I've done quite a bit of recording with nylon-strung guitars, blending jazz with my love for classical playing. The best model I have for both styles is my Di Giorgio – that's all it says inside. It's hand-built by a guy in the Brazilian mountains near Rio using exotic tonewoods.

"I have a rare Spanish guitar built by RE Spain, an English luthier. He only made a few hundred, I believe, and the workmanship is superb. It sounds beautiful, while the fingerboard is a large 54mm-wide handful."

Whilst a well-seasoned blues-rock player and collector of classic guitars, Steve also admits to having an inner bent for the unusual.

"Ah yes, my Gretsch G5034TFT, it's the coolest guitar I have," he says. "This is from the company's Rancher series, finished in Savannah Red with gold hardware including a Bigsby, and a body-mounted Fideli'Tron just above the soundhole. It really does sound good and there's a great persona about it. I've not used it live yet though, maybe soon..."

For more information on The Steve Summers Band visit www.thestevesummersband.co.uk

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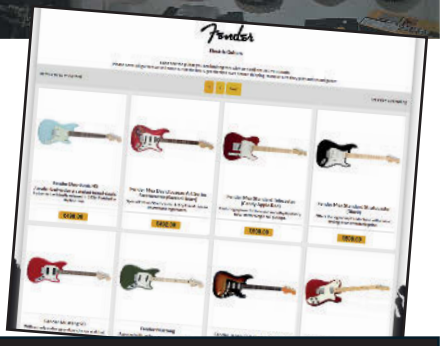

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All about... Speakers

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There is a world of difference between speakers intended for hi-fi or studio monitoring and those used in guitar amps. Flat and full-frequency response is undesirable for electric guitars and, instead, guitar speakers work best when colouring an amplifier's tone and dynamic response. Consequently, they come in various sizes and configurations – and understanding the variables is crucial.

How speakers work

Under string vibration, acoustic guitar tops move backwards and forwards to create sound waves through compression and rarefaction. A speaker cone performs exactly the same function in pretty much the same way, but it's set in motion electronically rather than mechanically.

As passive devices, speakers have relatively few components, and you can refer to the diagram on the following page to identify the parts and see how they fit together. The top plate and the core are in physical contact with the magnet, so there's a strong magnetic field across the gap between them. The coil former and the wire coil 'float' in this gap without making physical contact, and this assembly is called the motor.

The amplifier output is connected directly to the wire coil. When current from the amp flows in the coil it becomes an electromagnet and its magnetic polarity flips as the current alternates. The actual magnet's polarity is fixed, so it alternately attracts and repels the coil, causing the floating coil assembly to move back and forth. Since it's glued to the cone, the cone moves too – and that produces sound waves.

Sensitivity (SPL)

I was in a band with a guitarist who used a Marshall head and 2x12 cab, but my old Vox AC30 with two original Celestion Blue speakers was considerably louder. Although the Marshall was the more powerful amp, the Blues had higher sensitivity than the speakers in the Marshall cab.

Sensitivity is measured by feeding the speaker one watt and measuring the sound pressure level (SPL) at a distance of one metre. Guitar speakers typically measure somewhere between 93dB and 103dB, with 103dB being the most sensitive.

The G12 Greenbacks in the Marshall cab had a sensitivity of 97dB compared to the 100dB Blues. It might not seem like a lot, but every 3dB increase in sensitivity is equivalent to doubling an amp's power.

The factors that determine sensitivity are the mass of the cone, voice coil and former, plus the length of the coil and strength of the magnet. Low mass and strong magnets should result in high sensitivity.

If you're struggling to hear yourself over the drummer with a medium-powered amp, or you just want some more clean headroom, try installing a more efficient speaker. Conversely, less efficient speakers may allow you to crank up an amp that might otherwise be too loud.

Power handling

It's wrong to equate power handling with loudness because all the figures give you is a guideline for matching speakers with amps. Common sense should tell you that a 50-watt amp is too powerful for a 25-watt speaker. In fact, a 50-watt amp will most likely be too powerful for a 50-watt speaker because transient peaks always greatly exceed an amp's given power rating. You would be safer with a 75-watt speaker or even two 50-watt speakers.

When pushed hard, guitar speakers can start to compress and add a gritty distortion that suits certain styles. Some speakers also lose cohesion in the low-frequency range, which is another characteristic that divides opinion. A heavier and stiffer cone, combined with increased damping and a wider-voiced coil, will enable a speaker to handle more power. However, the downside can be a tone that's bland and colourless, and feels stiff to play – plus lower sensitivity.

If you're struggling to hear yourself over the drummer with a medium-powered amp, try installing a more efficient speaker

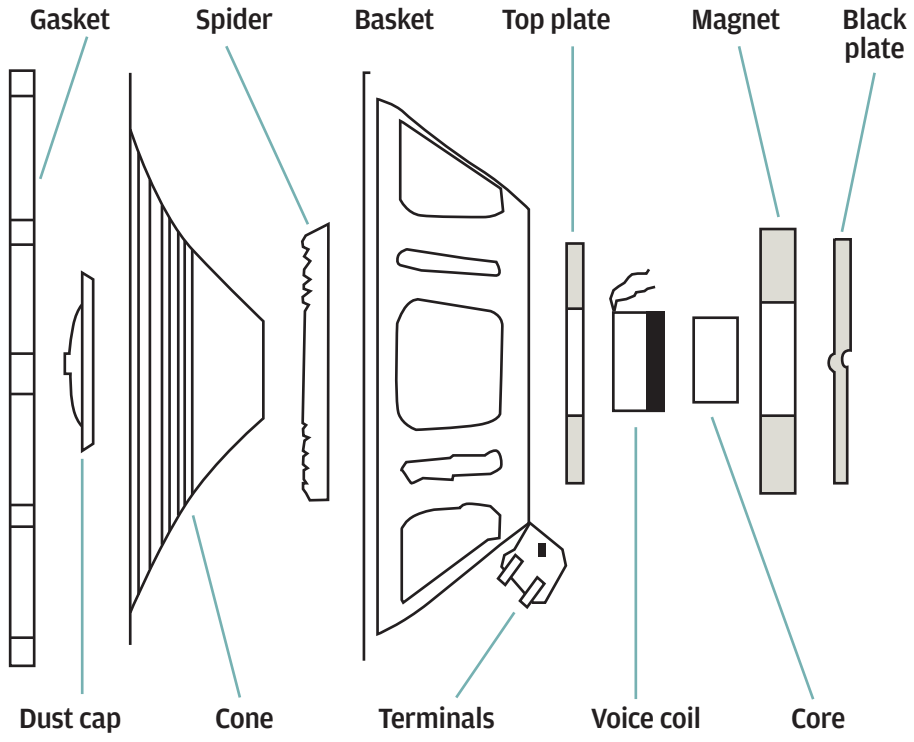
While pushing guitar speakers beyond their recommended capabilities can produce pleasing results, it's risky and sooner or later you may end up blowing the speaker. This is a blanket term for a variety of unpleasant symptoms. You may notice that even at low volume the speaker sounds grainy, scratchy or distorted. If the cone has been forced to travel beyond its limits, the cone can split, which results in fuzzy distortion – or classic Kinks guitar tones according to legend.

Prolonged overheating can cause the material fixing the coil in position to break down and the coil to unravel. With such a tight gap, the coil can rub against the edges, which produces more undesirable sounds.

The worst case scenario is a coil that has overheated and burned out. When this happens you'll get no sound at all and you should turn off your amp immediately or you may end up blowing that too.

If you suspect a blown coil, set a multimeter to its lowest resistance setting and look for a reading across the speaker >

terminals that more or less matches the given speaker impedance. Alternatively, touch the terminals of a nine-volt battery against the speaker terminals. If you can't get a resistance reading – or a popping sound from the battery – you can reasonably conclude that your speaker is toast. Your options are to have it re-coned or replaced.



Impedance

The voice coil is basically a wire-wound resistor, so all speakers have a load impedance rating given in ohms. The figure is nominal since the coil's resistance is not constant across the frequency range. The same model of speaker with different impedance ratings will have voice coil variations in inductance and mass. According to Celestion's Ian White, 16-ohm versions are typically brighter than their 8-ohm counterparts.

Amplifiers will have either a fixed or switchable output impedance and the speaker impedance should match the amp's for optimum performance and tone. An amp with fixed output impedance rated at 100 watts into a 4-ohm speaker will put only 50 watts through an 8-ohm speaker.

The amp will also run cooler and cleaner, so an improvement in tone doesn't necessarily accompany the drop in power. Connect the same amp to a 2-ohm speaker and it will attempt to run at 200 watts before possibly burning itself out.

Like resistors, speakers can be combined in series or parallel. Two 8-ohm speakers in series present a 16-ohm load to the amp. Two 8-ohm resistors in parallel present a 4-ohm load. The rule is that you can go higher than the specified rating – if you have to – but you must not go lower.

Resonance

Speaker cones are not unlike drum skins, and they have a natural resonance frequency that plays a large part in voicing the speaker. Bass speakers will have a lower resonant frequency, and guitarists such as Paul Kossoff preferred them for a warmer and more rounded tone. Some drop-tuned metal players also prefer a lower resonant frequency. A light and loose cone suits players who like rootsy and retro tones because they tend to be more dynamically responsive and you'll hear more harmonic overtones. However, when pushed hard the bass can sound blurry and indistinct and the upper frequencies may get harsh.

Manufacturers typically coat the corrugated edges of the cone with a silicon substance to control response by limiting cone excursion. This process is called doping and, in addition to tightening the bass, it minimises odd mechanically generated harmonic overtones called edge yowl or cone cry.

Doping reduces the resonance peak at the upper cut-off frequency for less chime and complexity, but also means less likelihood of harshness. Doped speakers are popular with rock players who prefer high gain and high volume. When buying speakers, consider the resonant frequency and the amount of doping to determine which ones will suit your needs.

Incidentally, the term 'breaking in' a speaker actually refers to loosening up the edge for slightly deeper lows, smoother treble and a more dynamic feel. You can accelerate the process by playing music through the speaker or using a noise generator; but simply playing through it works fine, too.

Speaker cones are not unlike drum skins, and they have a natural resonance frequency that plays a large part in voicing the speaker

Cones

Almost all guitar speaker cones are made from paper pulp, but that doesn't mean they all look and sound the same. Ever-increasing power, and a tendency for guitarists to overdrive their amps, forced speaker manufacturers to stiffen their cones as well as their edges.

These days, most cones are ribbed for increased stiffness without increased weight. This reduces speaker breakup and prevents the cone from warping, so it's all good right? Well, not entirely. Lots of early guitar speakers had smooth cones, and now that low-power amps are so popular, their limitations are not necessarily an issue. Consequently, some players have discovered that the smooth cones of early Jensens, ELACs and so forth provide interesting sonic characteristics.

Modern manufacturers, such as Warehouse, are now offering smooth cone options for players who are into early-40s and early-50s electric jazz and Chicago blues. Warehouse describes the smooth cone tone as "more vintage, woody, smoky and organic". You'll also get a bit less treble and quicker breakup.

Magnets

Three types of magnets are used in guitar speakers. From the early 50s, most had alnico magnets, but as the cost of the cobalt used in the alloy sky-rocketed, manufacturers moved to ceramic magnets. The latest neodymium magnets offer the highest magnetic strength-to-weight ratio.

Ascribing sonic characteristics to magnetic materials is problematic because so much depends on other elements, such as doping and cone design, as previously discussed. For instance, the Jensen P12R and Celestion Blue both have alnico magnets and are even a similar colour, yet they sound totally different.

With that caveat, I would associate alnico speakers with chiming harmonically complex highs and soft bass. Ceramic speakers often have tighter and quicker lows, coupled with more upper-midrange bite and punch, but rolled off highs. Neodymium combines elements of alnico and ceramic.

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Chord Clinic

This month, we look at ways to get creative with just a guitar and a chord sequence. **ROD FOGG** steers the ship of harmony through the dark waters of dissonance

Let's get started with the simple open-string chord sequence in figure 1: D, G, E minor and A. Strum it, pick it, count four beats in a bar and give the chords a bar each. While this is not 'the' four-chord sequence that seems to occur in so much contemporary music (that would be D, A, B minor and G), you can keep on cycling it around and could probably base an entire song on it.

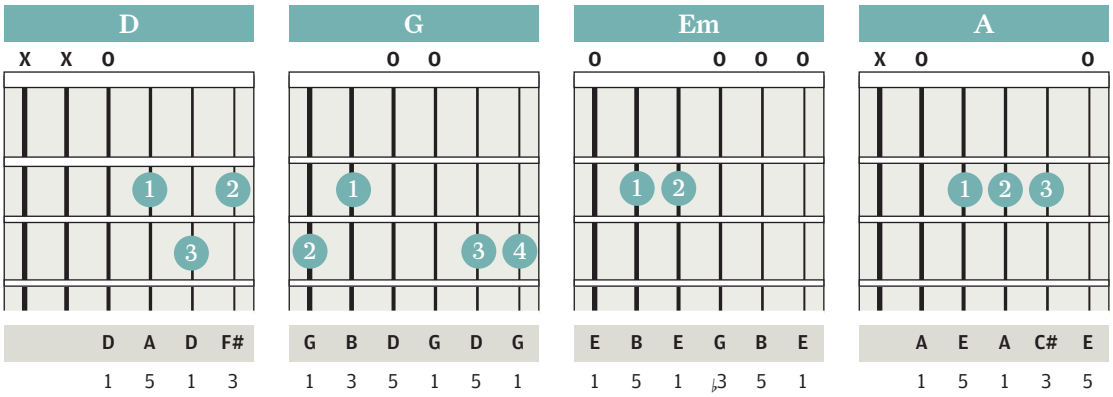
Figure 2 introduces some ideas that will make this chord sequence a bit more interesting, resulting in the words "hey" and "oooh" being uttered by anyone who hears you play it. We are just adding one note per chord, but the result is that the top two notes in every chord are now D (third fret, B string) and the open E. Strum or fingerpick, emphasising the slight dissonance between these two notes, and maybe take the option to slip back to A at the end of the sequence so that we hear the Asus4 resolving.

Let's say we want to take things in a different direction, and instead of cycling round and round we turn our four bars into an eight-bar chord sequence by adding four new bars, taking the harmony to some new places. The new four bars are going to be B minor, E, G and A; you will find the chords you need in figure 3. Play this eight-bar sequence through twice, and you could take the option to speed up the G and A chords second time through so that they both come in the seventh bar. You could then return to D (major or sus2) in the eighth bar and bring a sense of conclusion to the sequence. At this point, you would probably be heading for the chorus, assuming that this eight-bar section was the verse. However, we are not done with this piece of music yet, and will save the chorus for next month's Chord Clinic.

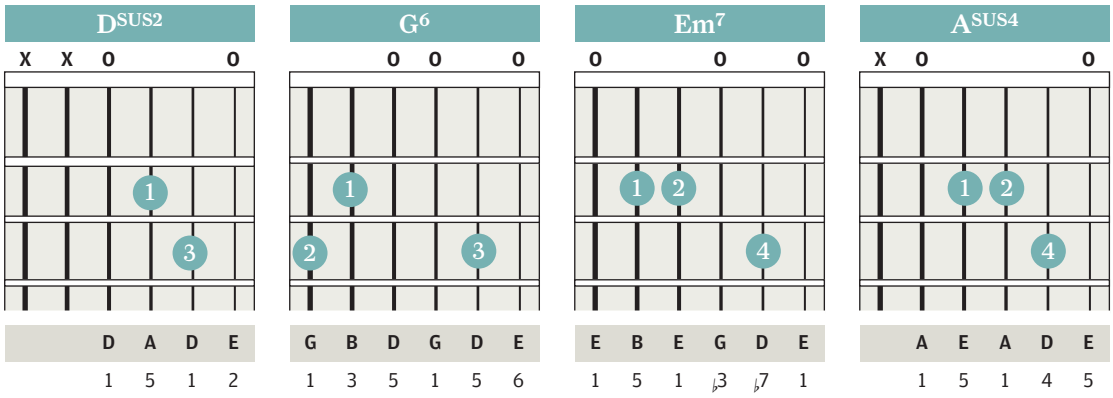
We now have an eight-bar chord sequence with an E minor chord in the first half and an E major chord in the second half. You should be finding that when you arrive on the E major chord you feel as if you have travelled away from the 'home' that the less adventurous first four bars suggest.

Figure 3 includes two other shapes, which we are going to use as passing chords – the way we describe those chords whose appearance is brief and whose function is to connect two other chords. Place the A sharp diminished seven chord in the second half of bar four, which now goes from A or Asus4 to

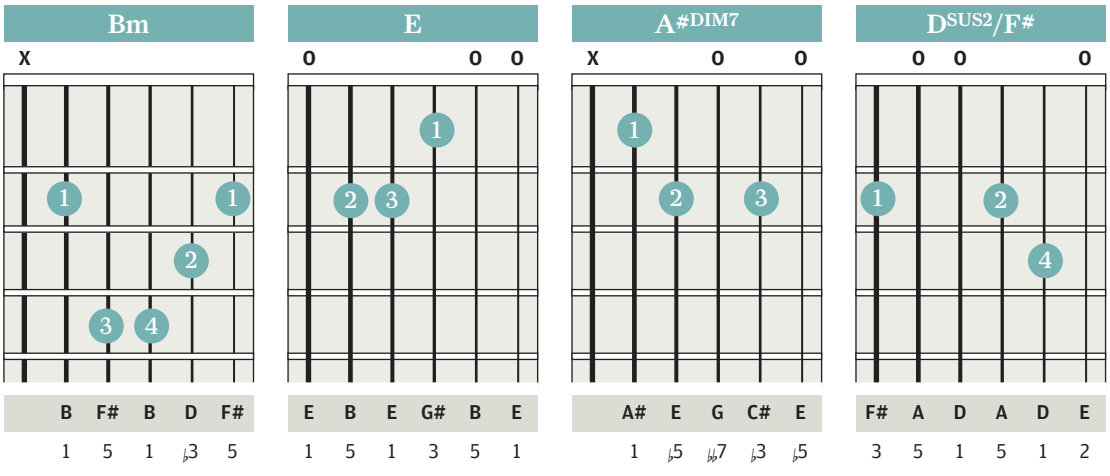
Virtuous cycle (Fig 1)



Plus one (Fig 2)



Just passing (Fig 3)



A#dim7, arriving on B minor in bar five. Give it a try; it's quick, but it seems to have a lot of power to push the sequence forwards. You can use the Dsus2/F# chord in bar two as a passing chord between the G and E minor chords in bar three. If you've been keeping up, you should be playing something like this:

|| Dsus2 | G6 Dsus2/F#| Em7 |
Asus4 A#07 | Bm | E | G | A ||

I hope you'll agree that it's a long way from the four-bar sequence we had at the beginning of this lesson.

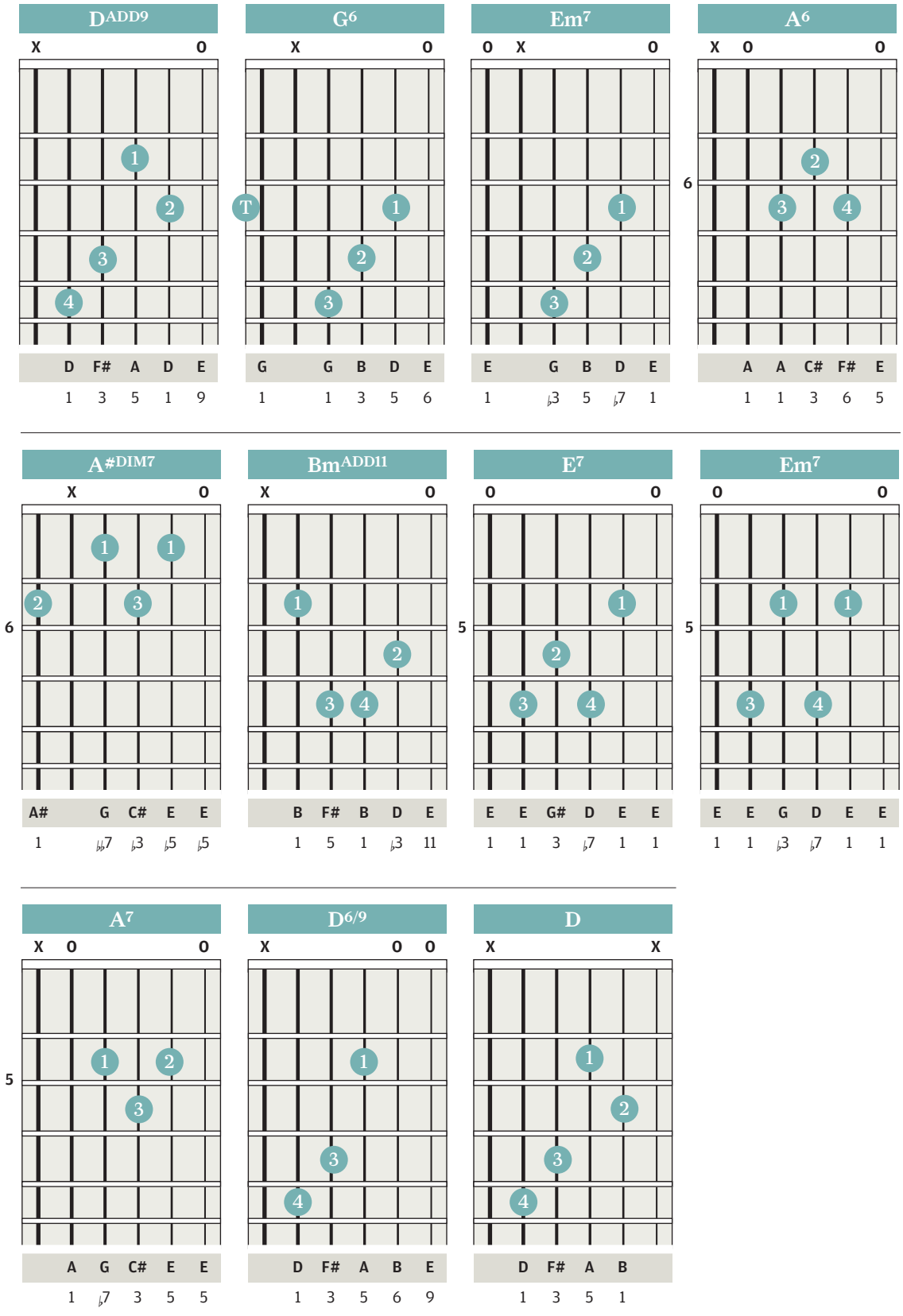
Figure 4 takes a different approach to the same chord sequence, using higher voicings with sixths, sevenths and added notes but maintaining, except for the final D major, the open top E string. There is something richer about this harmony that we are not necessarily claiming as better; but it's definitely different – and the closely voiced notes in the middle of the chords combine with the sparkling open E to add a dreamy sweetness, which some might consider overdone. Try it at a slower tempo, playing arpeggios instead of strumming – it will probably sound best on an acoustic.

Play figure 4 through chord by chord, four beats each, but remembering to give the A6 and A#dim7 chords only two beats each. We have left out the Dsus2/F#, but you could slip in a passing F# bass note at the end of the G6 chord to lead down to the Em7.

The A6 chord is fingered using fingers two, three and four to encourage you to slide into the shape from the previous chord, perhaps after first playing the open A string. If the D6/9 chord at the end is a little too schmaltzy for you (I hesitate to use the "J" word) just go straight to the plain D major chord to finish. As we approach the final D chord, instead of using G major and A major we have gone for E minor seven and A seven – E minor seven being a good substitute for G in this situation. Feel free to ignore the low E string in this Em7 and the preceding E7, as the higher bass note will give the chord a lighter texture.

The way to get the most out of this kind of work is to back up the practice on the guitar with the theory that comes from the chord diagrams. Check out the spellings of the chords (in other words, what notes they contain) and relate them to the intervals written below the letter names. Next time you get asked to play a mundane chord sequence, you will have some ideas of your own. More next month! >

Take it higher (Fig 4)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: Tele upgrade project, more Chord Clinic please and frustrated by flats

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Project Paisley

Dear *G&B*,

My thanks indeed for your June issue, which detailed 25 top Tele tips for those that simply must have something differently unique in their lives – that's most of us then!

For quite some years, as it happened, I had been looking for someone to refinish my '83 Paisley Tele, which had a storied history of use and abuse resulting in the front 'wallpaper' being completely gone, as in *really* gone! It had somehow been scraped back to the wood and taken a couple of dings on the way, plus an extra pickup slot in the mid position and an arm chamfer! None of my doing, I hasten to add, but I'm told the intention was to upgrade to a 'custom' Paisley, like James Burton's, which never got finished due to the difficulty in finding the correct wallpaper. That, it seems, was almost impossible. When it was returned so badly damaged to me I was so disappointed I wrapped it up, put it in a box and left it there for the next 25 years! But every time I saw Brad Paisley, I vowed to have it restored.

By luck, early this year I located Russell Foster, who had indeed done such a task and made a really great job of it, too. So I sent the body to him for his appraisal in May, just before I received your June issue with the 25 Tele Tips and the pink Paisley Tele on the cover. It was crucial in my decision process to get the job done. I had already been in contact with Marc Ransley of Mojo Pickups for an Open Top Tele neck pickup and decided to have a matching pair for the pink Paisley, with gold foil inserts for neck and mid, along with his Hot Burrito bridge pup for a bit of bite.

Russell accepted the commission and confirmed that it was indeed an original Paisley pattern from the late-68 era, as identified from the rear Paisley finish, which was virtually immaculate and complete apart from a couple of side dings. Although the guitar itself was built in late '83, I assume they were using up the old stock they had. It's been suggested that this one may be even rarer than the earlier '68s and '72s due to only a handful being produced at the time. Well, it certainly is rare now!

It has only recently come back to me from Russell and the finish is absolutely brilliant – a real relic Paisley as I had requested, complete with a couple of light dings and scrapes, some scratches and a little light checking, too. The Paisley finish is truly superb, an exact replica of the rear, even down to the aged gold foil colour, a tremendous tribute indeed!

As I had never liked the pink spray on the original pickguard, I decided to leave it as is, showing the pickups on display in their slots. The chrome and gold foil inserts complement the colours of the guitar, as do the grey pickup cover and red tape wrap on the Hot Burrito sitting in the bridge.

The saddles are titanium compensated ones, which ring out those Tele tones – adding further definition on the original JV bridge. Marc Ransley has done a really great job, the foils being 42AWG & the Burrito being hotter than one may expect by some degree of coolness!

For the switching, I went to Dave Buck, who supplied a solderless custom seven-way loom, incorporating five Strat options, a reverse phase, and in-series too – certainly enough for most to be gigging with! He also supplied the relic control plate and knobs in a similar grey to the bridge Burrito cover. I have to say it sounds and plays tremendously, a real relic worthy of its predecessor in looks and sounds.

Yet worthy of even more note for those who simply must note is that all this customising was done right here in the UK. From the outset, the plan was to have a different custom Paisley if possible and what has been achieved thanks to Russell Foster, Marc Ransley, Dave Buck – and of course your own crucial input through the 25 Tele Tips – is one that still retains the Paisley look and feel, but has also evolved into a real resurrected relic. It's a much-loved and highly treasured Tele that can still shout it out some! I am very grateful to all involved. My thanks again.

John Brown, via email

G&B Thanks for writing, John. Firstly, what a great story! There's nothing quite like getting a trusty old instrument back into stage-ready shape. Secondly, your letter highlights how much talent there is among small, homegrown builders. Where would the industry be without its grassroots heroes?

Striking a Chord

Thank you for helping me in my journey in guitar music. Since reaching retirement age 10 years ago, I've been pursuing my ambition to be in the oldest NEW rock band. Your magazine is an essential part of my efforts, it's a continuing source of inspiration, information and education. Every edition spurs me on to practise, persevere and explore the endless vistas of guitar sound. The quality of production and excellence of journalism are a constant source of enjoyment.
I happened to start my subscription at the start of Chord Clinic – another great aid. Might I suggest that a collection of these tutorials would be a useful publication?
David Barlow, via email

Flat's entertainment

I really enjoyed November's 50 Low-Cost Ways To Improve Your Tone. However, do you realise how much grief it causes when your lead guitarist turns up at rehearsal and announces he wants to detune to E flat? Nightmare!
Tim Rojek, via email

Tuning down half a step is a classic way to fatten your Strat

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics. Visit **www.orangeamps.com** for the full spec.

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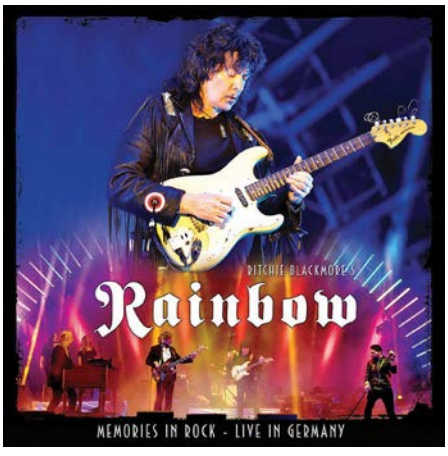
New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues



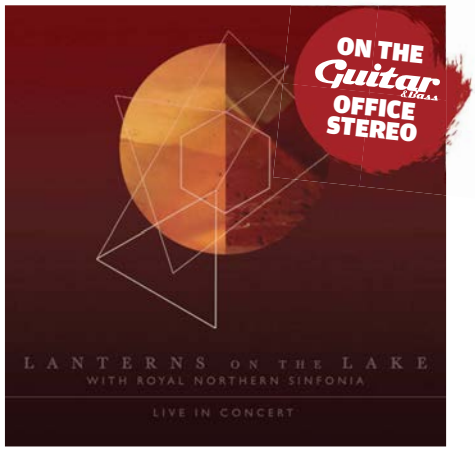
Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow

MEMORIES IN ROCK – LIVE IN GERMANY

It's good news for all guitar fans that Ritchie Blackmore's much-vaunted 'return to rock' was committed to tape this summer, as it was something of a blink-and-you'll-miss-it affair, lasting just three shows. Ritchie's not been laying idle, of course, he's just been playing in a different genre with his medieval-themed outfit Blackmore's Night. Thankfully, his 'rock chops' are still very much in place for this crowd-pleasing career retrospective covering both Deep Purple and Rainbow highlights. There may be no A-listers in Blackmore's new band line-up, but they're well drilled. It's Blackmore that everyone's there to see and he's in impressive form for old classics including *Highway Star*, *Child In Time* and, of course, *Smoke On The Water*. Have you still got Ian Gillan's phone number by any chance, Ritchie? **SH**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Whitesnake, Deep Purple*



Lanterns On The Lake

WITH ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA

This stirring live recording captures Newcastle band Lanterns On The Lake's one-night-only appearance with Royal Northern Sinfonia at The Sage in Gateshead. It's immediately apparent from brooding opening track *Of Dust & Matter* that it's a match made in heaven, with strings, brass and timpani adding even greater majesty to the band's widescreen beauty. Guitarist Paul Gregory's Vox AC30 positively roars as his huge atmospheric reverbs and cello bowing, bathed in fuzz, add grit to the dreamy soundscapes. The affecting swell reaches a peak on *Beings*, the title track from the band's third album, with the porcelain tones of vocalist Hazel Wilde enveloped in a glorious wash of ambient noise. It's all the more stunning when you consider that band and orchestra had only one rehearsal together before this performance. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Explosions In The Sky, Sigur Rós*

Neil Young

PEACE TRAIL

Less than six months after his last album release, *Earth*, with his backing band Promise Of The Real, Neil Young returns with another long-player that was dashed off in reportedly just four days.

With Young backed by veteran drummer Jim Keltner and bassist Paul Bushnell, this is predominantly an acoustic offering with the odd thunderous, massively distorted electric solo thrown into the mix to spice things up. The title track (complete with occasional vocodered vocals) is a promising opener, but it's a false dawn ahead of what is largely a disappointing record.

The nursery rhyme-level musical approach taken on *Texas Rangers* and *John Oaks* detracts from the political points Old Shakey is trying to express. More haste, less speed next time please Neil. **SH**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Bob Dylan*

Doyle Bramhall II

RICH MAN

High-profile collaborator, Bramhall (Clapton, Elton John, Gregg Allman) goes it alone on his fourth studio album. Although hints of his travels to India and North Africa are present, the biggest influence here is the rootsy blues/soul mash-up of The Black Keys. Bramhall mostly dials down the guitar heroics, cutting loose on a few occasions, including some tasty soloing on *Mama Can't Help You*. **SH**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Black Keys, Gary Clark Jr*

Testament

BROTHERHOOD OF THE SNAKE

2017 will mark 30 years since Testament released their first album, and they appear to have lost none of the aggression that made them one of the most popular bands on the thrash metal scene. The title track opens like a freight train, and many of the tracks retain an old-school thrash vibe that will appeal to the metal fans who helped place this genre on the musical map in the early 80s. **GB**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Anthrax, Slayer*

In Flames

BATTLES

For their 12th studio album, In Flames changed things up by bringing in Grammy-nominated producer Howard Benson. *Battles* is crammed full of anthemic hooks, with *The End* and the title track particular highlights. There are technical riffs aplenty and gut-wrenching vocals on tracks such as *Through My Eyes*. Not a massive departure from previous albums, but one that will keep fans of the band enthralled nonetheless. **GB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Soilwork, Children Of Bodom*

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Enter our competition to win the amazing Gear Of The Year-winning guitar and amp featured on the cover of this magazine – worth more than £1,000!

To celebrate our annual Gear Of The Year awards issue, *G&B* is giving one lucky reader the chance to win an awesome guitar and amp prize worth more than £1,000. The Gretsch Electromatic G5420T hollowbody scooped the prize for best electric guitar under £1,000, while Blackstar's ID:Core Stereo 150 Combo was the deserved winner of the best amplifier under £1,000 category. One lucky reader will win the actual guitar and amp featured on the cover of this issue. For more information on Gretsch's Electromatic range, go to **gretsch.com**. For the lowdown on Blackstar's ID:Core amps, visit **blackstaramps.com**. For your chance to win this amazing prize, go to **guitar-bass.net/comps/goty** and enter your details.

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Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

Stand Out in the Crowd

System 10 Stompbox Digital Wireless Guitar System

The innovative digital wireless guitar system from Audio-Technica that fits right on your pedal board. Pair up to 8 guitars with separate body pack transmitters for easy on stage changeovers, and either mute, tune or use a second rig with the A-B switching. With a discreet clip bodypack, sturdy metal pedal casing, and no large intrusive aerials, it is ready to go straight from the box to the stage. Operating on the 2.4GHz range, it is also both interference and wireless license free.

www.audio-technica.com

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WIN!

AN EARTHQUAKER DEVICES ACAPULCO GOLD PEDAL

Enter our competition to win this awesome dirt pedal worth £119!

To celebrate the release of our *Joy Of FX* magazine, *G&B* is giving one lucky reader the chance to win an EarthQuaker Devices Acapulco Gold pedal, courtesy of our good friends at Audio Distribution Group. EarthQuaker Devices has made a massive splash in 2016, and its Avalanche Run reverb and delay pedal earned a place in our 20 Best FX Pedals In The World Today list in this magazine. The Acapulco Gold is a brilliantly simple one-knob distortion pedal based on the power section of a cranked Sunn Model T – an iconic amp beloved of stoner rockers. It gives you the open, clear crunch of a driven valve amp in a compact stompbox. For more details on EarthQuaker Devices, go to **earthquakerdevices.com**. To enter the giveaway, visit **guitar-bass.net/comps/acapulco** and enter your details.

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Fuzz fiends will find themselves in familiar territory with this self-explanatory three-control Level, Tone and Fuzz layout

The Jupiter is described by Walrus as a 'multi-clip' fuzz, and this switch flicks between three different clipping-diode arrangements

This switch provides a usable bass boost to fatten up your low end, useful in a band scenario where fuzz can be lost in the mix

Though capable of the same ballpark sounds as classic fuzzes, the small enclosure of the Walrus makes it much more pedalboard friendly than old-school units

Walrus Audio Jupiter Multi-Clip Fuzz

An articulate and supremely versatile fuzzbox with a range of switchable clipping modes to provide a rainbow of fuzz flavours

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £179
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass fuzz pedal with Level, Tone, Fuzz, three-way mode switch, Bass Boost on/off and bypass footswitch. Powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **CONTACT** www.walrusaudio.com

Fuzz has been undergoing a renaissance for a good while now, with all manner of boxes queueing up to mangle your signal – from small-enclosure reworkings of classic circuits to do-it-all multi-fuzz pedals to lavishly emblazoned boutique boxes promising majestic sonic sorcery. But fuzz is a difficult effect both to describe and control; and to define their character, as Walrus Audio points out, fuzz pedals tend to emphasise specific frequency ranges, which can be both a positive and negative attribute. The Jupiter is designed to offer enough options to dial in the right amount of fuzz with the proper tonal qualities to either cut through the mix or blend with the rhythm section. So from the thunderbolt-wielding deity on the front, you'll have deduced that the Jupiter is designed to produce gritty, thick and loud fuzz – and in its first mode, it's a fabulously smooth, rich tone that will place you broadly in Big Muff territory, but with more natural warmth and no worries about controlling 'nasal' tendencies, either.

Going through the three clipping-diode modes, the middle section provides the most in-your-face range of mid-rich distortion; the right-hand setting is somewhere between the two, and all are addictively sweet and easy to love. Plus, you can bring the Tone, Level and Fuzz knobs into play with each setting to fine-tune the fuzz on the fly.

Overall, if you've found yourself regularly trading fuzz pedals in because they're one-trick ponies, or if your set could benefit from more flexibility and tonal versatility in this area, the Jupiter could well be the end of your search.

• BARGAIN
Electro-Harmonix Double Muff £89
www.ehx.com
Is a Muff enough? This two-circuits-in-one Double Muff is tough enough to handle your vintage fuzz requirements

• BOUTIQUE
Death By Audio Apocalypse £219
www.deathbyaudio.com
Versatile fuzz with five waveforms and sweepable frequency equaliser

The type knob selects the BigSky's 12 reverb algorithms. Holding it down saves your chosen settings to a preset bank

Param 1 & 2 enable adjusting of different parameters for each reverb type – everything from the number of springs in spring to the shape of the vowel sounds in choral

The A, B & C switches select the three presets in each of the 100 banks. Simply hold down A&B to move up a bank or B&C to move down

Inside the brushed aluminium enclosure lies a powerful Analog Devices SHARC ADSP-21369 processor and studio-quality 24-bit 96kHz A/D and D/A converters, which means the BigSky can outperform many studio rack units

Strymon BigSky

One reverb to rule them all? Professional and amateur players alike fall for the BigSky's ethereal charms – with good reason

Californian company Strymon has become synonymous with studio-quality digital effects and the BigSky is perhaps the brand's finest achievement since it was launched in 2009 by the team behind Damage Control. The big brother to the BlueSky is a pedalboard-friendly box that does the work of a rack unit, thanks to the 333MHz Sharc processor inside.

The BigSky's 12 reverb algorithms offer an incredibly wide spectrum of sounds, each of which gives you bottom-of-the-rabbit-hole levels of tweakability. In addition to traditional offerings that won't unduly colour your tone, such as Hall, Plate, Spring and Room, we get modes that sprinkle anything you play in a heavenly sheen. There's the utterly beautiful Cloud, a huge ambient reverb that works like a 'better switch' and Chorale, which emulates an ensemble of human voices accompanying your playing. Shimmer adds highly adjustable pitch-shifted tones; Swell brings the reverb or dry signal in gradually like a volume pedal; Magneto evokes the sound of a multi-head echo; Non-linear is an umbrella grouping for several reverse effects and gated reverbs.

The BigSky is well designed for live use, too. With 300 presets, triggered by three sturdy stomp switches, you'll have no trouble storing and switching between your favourite reverbs during a gig – nor will you lose track of what mode you're in, thanks to its bright LED screen. Stereo and MIDI ins and outs and an expression pedal input, plus a cab emulator for recording, add to the faultless functionality.

It would be no exaggeration to suggest that this is the best digital reverb pedal ever made – and countless pro guitarists would agree.

• BARGAIN
TC Electronic Hall Of Fame Mini £78
www.tcelectronic.com
The mini version of the Hall Of Fame has a single knob, but the TonePrint feature gives you access to countless reverb settings

• BOUTIQUE
Eventide Space
www.eventide.com
The BigSky is pretty much top of the range, but in the same price bracket the Eventide is a very serious competitor with 100 presets

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £479
- **DESCRIPTION** True- or analogue buffered-bypass digital reverb pedal with 12 studio-class reverb algorithms and 300 presets, infinite sustain and freeze functions; Decay, Pre-delay, Mix, Tone, Mod, Param 1 & Param 2 controls; cab emulator; stereo ins & outs; LED display; powered by 9V centre-negative power supply (included)
- **CONTACT** www.strymon.net

The small-footprint 1.5-inch casing contains two internal DIP switches – one for altering the EQ and another for increasing the default gain setting

Xotic's EP Booster provides up to 20dB of boost on the dial

Xotic EP Booster

One knob, one classic boost – this magic box based on the Echoplex preamp has become a favourite of players worldwide

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £143
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass boost pedal with internal DIP switches, powered by 9v battery or AC adaptor (not supplied)
- **CONTACT** www.xotic.us

"The EP Booster has been a constant on my pedalboard for the last five years. I use it to hit the front end of my amp a little harder, giving me warm sustain and controlled feedback. Small, one knob, bulletproof, magic in a box." Not our words, but the words of US guitarist David Grissom, which tells you all you really need to know about how highly regarded a simple pedal can be.

Since the dawn of time (well, electric-guitar time, anyway), guitarists the world over have hankered after a pedal with one knob that just says 'More', with 'more' broadly translating to more warmth, more sparkle, more presence in the mix, more volume and, well, just more character.

Such luminaries as Eddie Van Halen, Jimmy Page, Eric Johnson and Grissom – considered legends of tone, each and every one of them – have all, at some point or other, turned to the characteristics of a specific piece of equipment to serve this function: the preamp circuit of the rightly famed Maestro EP-3 Echoplex.

With the EP Booster, released back in 2010, this preamp's coveted qualities have now been squeezed into the smallest imaginable chassis. This FET-based volume boost – with its single button and single dial – has hidden charms, however, in the shape of two small DIP switches in the top right-hand-side of the cavity.

The first of these charms is a gain boost, which adds 3dB of gain to the pedal in its fully counter-clockwise position; the second is a choice of EQ, between a boost of the high-end or a flat EQ. Simplicity itself, but devastatingly effective... and Xotic also repeats the trick with a range of classic hardware including the likes of the SL Drive and SP Compressor, based on the Marshall Super Lead and Ross Compressor respectively.

• BARGAIN
TC Electronic Spark Mini £69
www.tcelectronic.com
Analogue tone-shaping 20dB boost

• BOUTIQUE
Wren & Cuff Supa Phat Phuk $189
www.wrenandcuff.com
While you wait for Bill Finnegan's forthcoming pedal, try this for rude-sounding germanium-powered bias boost

The Carbon Copy's Mod switch introduces pitch modulation, and the pedal also has two internal 'set and forget' trim pots you can use to change the width and speed of the effect

Regen(eration) controls the number of repeats

Mix controls the volume of your repeated sound, ranging from no repeat to louder than the original signal

The Carbon Copy offers between 20 and a generous 600ms of usable delay

MXR M169 Carbon Copy Analog Delay

An eminently musical retro-sounding analogue delay in a svelte casing, whose warm and characterful vintage repeats have made it a classic in its own right and a favourite of many a guitarist

A pedal that makes our top 20 by virtue of its sheer excellence and staying power, MXR's Carbon Copy Analog Delay debuted back in 2009 and has gone on to become one of parent company Dunlop's best-selling effects – and one of the world's most popular delays. The Carbon Copy was designed by Jeorge Tripps (of Way Huge Aqua Puss and Line 6 DL4 fame), so it's no surprise to find those pedals' successful history repeating here (excuse the weak delay-based pun).

Housed in a tough, pedalboard-friendly compact housing, the Carbon Copy packs a lot of functionality into its Phase 90-sized shell, thanks to the space-efficient control layout and the tucking away inside of two pots to control the speed and width of the modulation's pitch variation.

Sonically, the modulation effect is the true star of the show here. Rarely seen on the delay units of the time, the effect successfully captures the ever-changing wow and flutter of those classic vintage delay units that built the very edifice of rock 'n' roll. There's also a very healthy dose of usable self-oscillation to be found past the 12 o'clock mark on the Regen knob, which sounds exactly like a good vintage delay should.

We like the darker, brooding analogue tones, but if you're after more cut through, the Carbon Copy also comes in a Carbon Copy Bright version – just look for the lime-green casing rather than the original's snazzy flecked metallic finish – which has a more treble-focused voice. They've been designed to work in tandem, so why not buy both and have some serious analogue fun?

• BARGAIN
Electro-Harmonix Memory Toy £69
www.ehx.com
A cute and retro Memory Man in miniature form for minimal outlay

• BOUTIQUE
Walrus Audio Bellwether £329
www.walrusaudio.com
A highly controllable, full-featured stereo take on retro analogue delay with tap tempo

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £144
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass analogue BBD-based delay pedal with Regen, Mix, Delay and Mod controls; 9v battery or power supply
- **CONTACT** **www.jimdunlop.com**

The DC socket takes from nine to anything up to 18 volts, for more power and headroom

Hook up a TRS-wired expression pedal round the back and you can override the gain control, enabling you to 'swell' the gain level skywards as you solo away

A gain machine in disguise? The transformer switch flicks between high-headroom 'Bold' sounds and the more compressed 'Rich' option

Small, compact (though unusually tall) and full of hidden meaty goodness – it's the modern Supro way

Supro 1305 Drive

A musical, old-time Supro amp-aping overdrive with an output transformer and an intriguing expression-pedal option for increasing gain

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** USA-made true-bypass overdrive pedal with Volume, Gain, Tone and Bold/Rich transformer toggle switch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **CONTACT** www.suprousa.com

Supro – a spin-off of the once ubiquitous Valco guitar and amp manufacturer – was one of those near-mythical Stateside brands that people used to drool over in well-pawed catalogues throughout the Golden Age of the electric-guitar boom.

By the late 1960s, it had been consigned to history, the pawn shops, and later, eBay. There it largely remained until, in 2014, Pigtronix owner Absara Audio saw fit to revive the Supro name, releasing a series of well-received amps which we'd recommend you check out, too.

Earlier this year, the company announced its expansion into the stompbox realm with three pedals – the Fuzz, Boost and Drive. In keeping with the styling of its retro Americana forebears, the Drive's brushed aluminium enclosure, with its lightning logo and blue finish, cuts a fittingly retrofuturistic dash.

Supro claims it's the closest thing money can buy to the sound of a real overdriven Supro amp, achieved by mimicking the amp circuit at every stage – with special focus on the unique characteristics of the power-amp section, hence the unique Transformer switch.

Setting the in-built transformer to Bold results in a smidgen of dirt and a distinct thickening of the mids; flick it over to Rich and you'll be rewarded with a smoother crunch, with the mids flattened out and with more fizz in the top end.

Cranking up the gain adds solid and controlled drive with no obvious effect on playing dynamics – overall, Supro delivers on its promise that the Drive offers a pretty faithful reproduction of a throaty Supro's output stage, and the pedal is full of highly musical, highly usable sounds throughout its range.

• BARGAIN
Supreaux Deux £36
www.runoffgroove.com
A DIY kit for building your own Supro 16T in a box

• BOUTIQUE
JHS Pedals Superbolt Drive V2 £159
www.jhspedals.com
Another attempt to capture Supro's lightning in a box, with a dual gain switch

Add a dash of higher-octave ear candy to your solos or a 12-string-esque shimmer to your chordal work with the Up Octave dial

You can choose to send your mixed signal in mono, or send your dry and mixed signals to separate amplifiers

Create convincing bass tones here to thicken up or replace your guitar sound

Electro-Harmonix Nano POG

The revered Polyphonic Octave Generator from EHX is now available in super-slim compact format, with glitch-free tracking

Like the Micro POG (its slightly heftier sibling), the Nano POG is a miniaturised, stripped-down version of EHX's much-loved madness purveyor, the shapeshifting POG2. Designed ostensibly to make your guitar do a passable-in-a-loud-band imitation of instruments with a different frequency range (so, a 12-string guitar or mandolin, a bass etc), the effect can also be used to explore more diverse sonic territory, via mixing more than one octave effect, adding onboard EQ, a low-pass filter and detune, to create some otherworldly, powerful, or just plain disturbing, sounds – especially when combined with the drive, fuzz, modulation and delays in your arsenal.

In this compact, less-than-half-price version, something has to give, of course. Gone is the ability to store your presets, the slow attack, low-pass filter and detune controls and the range of extended harmonisation settings. What you do get is a straightforward triumvirate of level controls for the octave up, sub octave and dry sounds, and you can choose to send these as one combined signal in mono, or as a combination of effected and dry signals to two separate destinations. Octave effects live or die by the quality of their tracking, and the Nano POG's is excellent – it's polyphonic, so chords and notes are reproduced without glitches and with minimal latency.

Since octave is an effect you're unlikely to use on every song, you could investigate the Soul POG, a multi-effect combing the Soul Food transparent overdrive with the functionality of the Nano POG (plus a Mode switch for a choice of two different octave up sounds). Although you sacrifice the pedalboard real estate, you can use each effect together or separately.

• BARGAIN
Mooer Pure Octave £59
www.mooeraudio.com
11 octave modes, very tiny casing

• BOUTIQUE
Taurus Dexter Mark-2 £183
www.taurus-amp.pl
Great-sounding octave pedal with independent Level and Range pots to remove unwanted tones

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £172
- **DESCRIPTION** Compact digital Polyphonic Octave Generator pedal, with separate levels for Sub Octave, Octave Up and Dry, powered by 9v battery or adaptor
- **CONTACT** www.ehx.com

Flick the switch to return to the tones of the original Green Rhino pedal

The Green Rhino MkIV's secret weapon – add or remove 12dB of 100Hz low-end to either round out or supercharge the bass characteristics

In place of the MkII's Curve control is this 500Hz control for fine-tuning low-to-midrange frequencies to your taste

The new-for-2016 MkIV is housed in a smaller casing than its ancestors, but has lost none of their tonal thunder

Way Huge Green Rhino MkIV

A Tube Screamer-style drive with additional tone-sculpting for the low-end and midrange frequencies

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £152
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass overdrive with Volume, Tone, Drive, Classic, 100Hz and 500Hz controls, powered by 9v battery or power supply
- **CONTACT** www.jimdunlop.com

Blame Stevie Ray – the Ibanez Tube Screamer is among the best-selling and most often-imitated pedals of all time. Its ability to drive the front end of an amp into delicious bluesey crunch, then ladel on increasingly compressed-but-musical-sounding dirt, has made it one of the most enduring and sought-after guitar sounds. One of its defining characteristics is a midrange 'hump' that cuts through a typical band mix; and one of the common complaints levelled against it is a corresponding lack of bottom end, particularly exposed when playing in a three-piece setup. Over the years, variants have come and gone which have tried to address this perceived shortcoming by using different components in the circuit; others, notably the Way Huge Green Rhino MkII in 2010, took a different approach by offering a control to cut or boost the specific 100Hz low-end frequency by 12dB.

The MkII – a revitalised upgrade of the cult-favourite original (designed by Jeorge Tripps and oringinally released in 1994), was widely acclaimed; and for 2016, the MkIV has appeared, further refining the design while (quite literally) embodying the tone of the original, via a Classic switch. In case you were curious, the MkIII was a prototype, and only a couple now exist: according to Way Huge, most of the prototype circuit boards were converted to make three prototype Overrated Specials for Joe Bonamassa. Time will tell whether it's the ultimate incarnation of the TS sound, but its smaller, more pedalboard-friendly casing, 100Hz and 500Hz controls for respective low-end and mids shaping and its clarity and singing sustain will definitely take some beating, whatever the application.

• BARGAIN
Ibanez TS-Mini £69
www.ibanez.com
Really tiny, really authentic and at this price, a must-have for your pedalboard

• BOUTIQUE
Analog Man King Of Tone $245
www.analogman.com
A boutique overdrive favoured by many pro players, with superlative sounds and mode-based operation

The mix control blends the wet sound with the dry signal up until 1 o'clock. Between 1 o'clock and 3 o'clock it boosts the wet signal, and from 3 o'clock reduces the dry sound until fully-wet

The real fun starts when you connect an expression pedal to the Avalanche Run, and the Exp knob allows you to choose which of six functions you want it to control

The Avalanche Run's tap tempo can be adjusted between six different ratios that are selected using the Ratio control. Furthermore, the tempo can be set when the delay is not switched on – a handy feature for live use

This little toggle switch moves the Avalanche Run between normal, reverse and swell modes

EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run

Why buy two pedals to sate your delay and reverb needs when this ingenious blue box full of ambient noises will do both?

Expanding on EarthQuaker Devices' template for the popular Dispatch Master, the Avalanche Run is an easy-to-use combined delay and reverb machine with a host of modes that deliver dreamy ambient sounds aplenty.

This little blue pedal from the clever sonic architects in Akron, Ohio, has normal, reverse and swell modes and a tap tempo. In normal mode, we get traditionally configured delay and reverb; in reverse mode, the delay line is in reverse and the rather beautiful reverb remains in normal mode, while when set to swell the Avalanche Run reacts intuitively to your picking dynamics before a volume swell is added to the entire signal path. All of the above makes it a very attractive proposition for post-rockers, shoegazers and soundscapers who experiment intrepidly with self-oscillation and sound-on-sound pseudo looping. The delay has a useful maximun time of two seconds.

One of the key features of the Avalanche Run, which makes it a great choice for live use, is the ability to connect it up to an expression pedal, with the Exp selector switch allowing you to control one of six functions – very useful for cranking the delay mix or feedback during a gig to send your sound into self-oscillating mayhem.

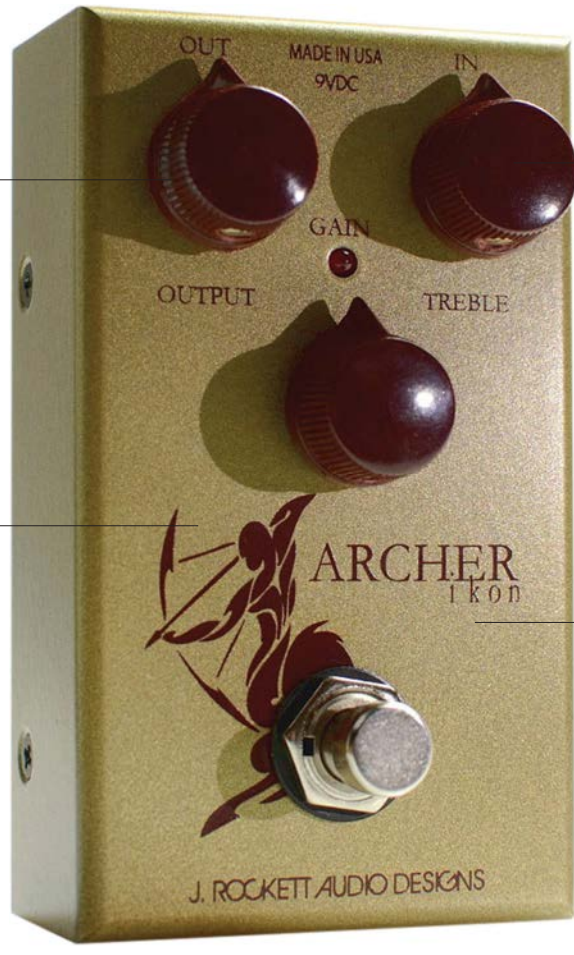
G&B test pilot Paul Gregory of Newcastle band Lanterns On The Lake noted: "The feedback function is amazing for pseudo looping – you can get some really epic pieces as the delays cascade into feedback, creating a whole host of ambient noise, and in a live setting it's very easy to control. This pedal has so many possibilities hiding in it and each one I've found has been very usable."

• BARGAIN
Behringer DR400 £49
www.music-group.com
Pocket-sized reverb and delay unit powered by Behringer's Real Sound Modeling processer, with 11 different modes

• BOUTIQUE
EarthQuaker Devices Disaster Transport SR £329
www.earthquakerdevices.com
EarthQuaker leads the way on delay/reverb pedals – this one does modulation, too

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £299
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital delay & reverb pedal with two seconds of delay & three reverb modes: Normal, Reverse & Swell; Time, Repeats, Tone, Delay Mix, Decay, Reverb & Mix controls; expression jack assign switch, ratio selector switch, mode selector switch expression pedal jack; tap tempo
- **CONTACT** www.earthquakerdevices.com



When maxed out, the Archer Ikon will make your amp sing. It has quite high output compared to other boosts in its class

The Ikon is, of course, an attempt to create a sonically authentic replica of Bill Finnegan's mythical (and legendarily rare and expensive) Klon Centaur, in its warmer-sounding gold incarnation

The Ikon's sound – characterised by many as sitting midway between the classic pillars of tweed and Vox – has a lovely high-end sheen that you won't want to turn off

The J Rockett Archer also manifests itself in a silver version, released in 2015. While anatomically very similar, the Ikon is an improvement – a little smoother and more sophisticated overall

J Rockett Audio Designs Archer Ikon

If you want a versatile drive pedal that ranges from transparent boost to medium-gain loveliness, you need to audition the Ikon

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £165
- **DESCRIPTION** Buffered-bypass boost/overdrive pedal powered by 9v centre-negative power supply or battery, made in USA
- **CONTACT** www.rockettpedals.com

The gold Klon Centaur, created by US effects guru Bill Finnegan and released in 1994, is a pioneering low-gain overdrive/boost that's become one of the most desirable pedals on the planet. The uninitiated may well wonder, reasonably enough, what the fuss is about – after all, a clean boost or low-gain overdrive sound is a bread-and-butter addition to the sonic arsenal of guitarists in any genre, and as a consequence, the market is flooded with stompboxes that will provide a perfectly usable take on these staple effects. Yet what makes the Klon Centaur so different, so special and – some maintain, so ridiculously hyped – is that unlike many overdrive and distortion circuits, the Centaur doesn't obtrusively 'colour' the sound of the guitar as it adds gain; it also provides a clear-sounding volume boost with subtle midrange and compression, which many players find interacts with their amplifier in an exceptionally musical way. This is why it has become one of the few 'always on' effects in the pedalboards of the pros and a go-to drive for the likes of Jeff Beck, John Mayer and many a player who relies on expression and subtlety.

So that's the Klon Centaur – discontinued in 2009 after 5,400 units were made according to the official site, and consequently, as rare and prized as unicorn horn. Of the many klones out there, J Rockett's Ikon is one of the closest approximations there is, and was created by Chris Van Tassel and Jay Rockett, who worked with Finnegan on his later Klon KTR pedal brand. When *G&B* tested it alongside the ThorpyFX Peacekeeper and the Wampler Tumnus, Editor Chris Vinnicombe wrote: "The best clean boost of the bunch, with a lovely high-end sheen you won't want to switch off. 95 per cent of the Klon experience for 10 per cent of the price."

• BARGAIN
Electro-Harmonix Soul Food £61
www.ehx.com.
One of the most affordable klones on the market, and you'll be as cheerful as it is cheap

• BOUTIQUE
Free The Tone Red Jasper £205
www.freethetone.com.
An excellent-sounding smooth boost or mid-gain drive

The intriguingly named Hotknob can be configured to control any combination of parameters simultaneously – sort of like an onboard expression pedal

The right footswitch can be used to scroll through presets, making the H9 practical for live work. It can also be used as a tap tempo control

The H9's many connectivity options include MIDI in and out on the side and USB and expression pedal connections on the rear

This large central knob, encircled by the LightRing, is used to select and adjust presets, dial in the tempo and name presets

Eventide H9 Harmonizer

Packing reverb, delay, modulation and pitch-shifting effects into a box smaller than a CD case, the H9 could be the ultimate pedal

Multi-effects units are by no means every guitarist's cup of tea. Despite being a low-maintenance, space-saving option, they're maligned by many for the perceived lower quality of the sounds they offer and for not providing a comprehensive range of effects. However, if any one unit could be said to quash those claims it's Eventide's peerless box of sonic majesty, the H9.

Seemingly impossibly for a stompbox that's a mere 133x118x50mm, it's packed with eight algorithms taken from Eventide's mesmerising TimeFactor (delay), Space (reverb), PitchFactor (pitchshift) and ModFactor (modulation) units – plus its own UltraTap delay. The one-knob user interface is surprisingly straightforward to use and a pair of onboard switches make for easy live preset manoeuvres.

The sounds are studio quality, and Eventide has factored in MIDI compatibility, plus you can purchase new algorithms via the H9 Control app and USB and Bluetooth connectivity means you can scroll through and edit presets on your computer or tablet in the studio. Sure, it's a large amount of money for a single unit, but when you do the maths and tally up the cost of buying each of the separate Eventide pedals necessary to get all the sounds onboard, it starts to make sense. If you can stretch to the Max version – which gives you access to every effect in Eventide's impressive sonic arsenal – the sky truly is your limit. Alternatively, the cheaper, more basic, Core version (£449) still has vast scope. With everything from staple effects such as slapback, spring reverb and chorus to the complex ambient sounds provided by the SpaceTime and CrushStation algorithms, the H9 sounds amazing.

• BARGAIN
Line 6 M5 Stompbox Modeler £102
www.line6.com
Line 6's compact multi-effects unit is an absolute bargain, cramming in 100 distortion, modulation, delay & reverb effects

• BOUTIQUE
Eventide H9 Max £769
www.eventideaudio.com
Identical enclosure to the H9, but gives you access to every effect Eventide has ever made, including new distortion presets

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £569
- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-effects processor with 99 presets, reverb, delay, modulation & pitchshifting algorithms & onboard tuner; stereo I/O and real-time MIDI control, Bluetooth & USB connectivity, tap tempo; expression pedal & aux footswitch input
- **CONTACT** www.eventideaudio.com

The Xotic is 20 per cent smaller than your average wah, giving it a fighting chance of making it on to your pedalboard

Internally, there's a trim pot allowing for up to 6dB of boost, and a series of internal dip switches to control the wah's frequency range

Bias, Wah Q, Treble and Bass give you unprecedented control over the characteristics of your wah

This handy little blighter flashes to warn you that your battery's charge has dropped below 50 per cent

Xotic Wah XW-1

A high-end wah that offers a virtually limitless tonal palette, based on the Holy Grail of wahs – the Clyde McCoy wah made in Italy in the late 1960s

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £287
- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue true-bypass wah pedal with controls for altering frequency range, input gain, Bias, Wah Q, Treble and Bass. Powered by internal 9v PP3 battery or optional 10mA/9v DC PSU
- **CONTACT** www.xoticeffects.com

The XW-1 is the debut wah from Californian guitar and effects maker Xotic, and it's the real McCoy – that is to say, it's based on the pivotal wah pedal designed by Vox for trumpeteer Clyde McCoy and marketed in the late 1960s, though functionally, the Xotic is to that pedal what the Bugatti Veyron is to a Ford Cortina.

The spec incorporates an exhaustive selection of useful tone-shaping trickery – easily the most we've seen on a pedal of this kind. This includes a quartet of micro-pots that are sited unobtrusively along the pedal's right-hand side, an internal trim pot for setting the input gain and, again inside the pedal, a further four dip switches that allow settings such as the Q frequency, amount of presence cut and treble frequency in the treadle's toe-down range to be fine-tuned.

Start fiddling around with these in earnest (including matching the internal input gain trimmer control to match the level of your signal chain) and you will soon come to realise that the sheer variety of wah voicings in the XW-1 is absolutely staggering – the merest twist of the Bias or Wah Q controls will reveal yet another inspiring side to its personality.

It also has a fuzz-friendly buffering circuit to ensure it plays nicely with your fuzz unit of choice – a bonus, as the two effects together are a sonic match made in heaven.

Perhaps you're of the school of guitarists who only use wah sparingly – in which case, the level of engineering (and therefore the asking price) is overkill. However, if you're the kind of player who loves the effect and also cares about the provision of a "self-lubricating nylon bushing pivot for quiet and smooth operation with fully adjustable rocker-pedal tension", then check this out without hesitation.

• BARGAIN
VOX V847 £79
www.voxamps.com
An affordable, modern version of another classic wah model

• BOUTIQUE
Fulltone Clyde Deluxe £205
www.fulltone.com
Retro accuracy and more, with 10-stage variable input and three modes

Unlike lesser tape-echo replicas, the Belle Epoch's Mod control is its crowning glory – its wows and flutters have an authentically randomised and quirky pulse and pitchshift

Turn the dial to coat your sound in progressive levels of warm, tape-like artefacts

The Belle Epoch's authentic 80 to 800 milliseconds delay range covers most bases you'll need, from tight slapback to distinct echos

The EP-3-style discrete preamp in the Belle Epoch recreates the characteristic attack and sought-after tone of the original

Catalinbread Belle Epoch

An impressive analogue recreation of the much-loved Echoplex EP-3 tape echo which captures the degradation, self-oscillation and musicality of the original

Its preamp alone was enough to convince the likes of Eddie Van Halen, Brian May and Tom Verlaine to employ it for 'always-on' tonal colouration, and in the skilled hands of Jimmy Page, John Martyn, Neil Young, Andy Summers and a million other players, its echoes have added an extra dimension to the sound of rock 'n' roll that guitarists will forever return to.

Part of the charm of the Echoplex derives from the well-documented 'technical deficiencies' of tape echo that have become part of what we unconsciously recognise and love about the effect – wows, flutters, the attack of notes, the stray drive artefacts, the dramatic self-oscillations and signal degradations which, together, summon up a magic that you'd think was too mechanical and analogue in nature to ever simulate in the digital realm.

So the hybrid analogue/digital Belle Epoch is a brave attempt to replicate these characteristics. From the authentic attack of the note, to the beautiful modulation, to the convincing degradation of its repeats, it's hard to believe such an authentic sound could come from something so compact... that weighs next-to-nothing and is noise-free. Aside from nailing slapback echo, the chewy drive of the Record Level is a powerful feature that interacts with the Mix to create a huge range of tones and textures. The Mod feature also has a huge range, but is easy to set, allowing the pedal to create quirky little surprises – almost as if there's something unexplained going on inside. Texan tonehound Eric Johnson believes this is the closest alternative to a real Echoplex EP-3 that money can currently buy – that is high praise indeed, and should be enough to convince you to try one out without delay.

• BARGAIN
Danelectro Dan Echo £69
www.danelectro.com
Vintage tape effects with a Hi-Cut control, for a cheap price

• BOUTIQUE
T-Rex Replicator £659
www.t-rex-effects.com
The ultimate replication, with a motor, magnetic heads, a cartridge and expression-pedal control. Experience 'hygge'

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £161
- **DESCRIPTION** US-made Digital Signal Processing (DSP) tape-echo pedal with Echo Sustain, Mod, Rec Level, Mix Echo Delay, internal gain trimpot, true bypass/tails switching. Powered by 9v battery or adaptor
- **CONTACT** www.catalinbread.com

The Blend control can be used to mix the characteristics of your compressed signal with your natural sound, to preserve all-important playing dynamics

Attack governs how quickly the compression effect comes into play on the input signal – a fast attack is a key sonic signature of country chicken pickin', for example

This is useful for matching the Ego to the essential tonality of the guitar you're using, and also adds "sparkle and chime"

The Ego has side-mounted input and output jacks, but there's also a mini version of the pedal to suit cramped boards

Wampler Ego Compressor

A pro-player endorsed compressor offering lots of control over the important elements of your signal while still retaining playing feel and remaining transparent and unobtrusive

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £219
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass compression pedal with Volume, Sustain, Attack, Tone and Blend, with side-mounted input and output jacks, powered by 9v battery or power supply
- **CONTACT** **www.wamplerpedals.com**

Compression – the great leveller that makes too-quiet parts of a sound louder and overly loud sounds quieter – is still an underrated and misunderstood weapon in the guitar player's arsenal. Though of course we hear it on all recorded music, learning how to use a dedicated guitar compressor effectively can be a revelation for guitar players, giving unprecedented control over the 'shape' of notes, their sustain, and the overall quiet-to-loud dynamic of a playing performance. Traditionally, pedal-based units have taken different approaches, and specific units have earned reputations for 'colouring' the resulting sound with their own character.

Despite its name, Wampler has taken great pains to ensure the Ego remains in the background. Compared to typical compressors, its controls are fairly familiar and self-explanatory, but the high-quality components and the subtleties of the design are what separates it from the crowd. The ace-in-the-hole of the Ego is the Blend control, which enables you to mix together the controlled and sculpted characteristics of its compressed output with the original signal and the tonality of your guitar and amp. Since the signals run in parallel inside the Ego, the transition from your signal's natural note attack to the compressed signal taking over happens seamlessly. The result? An easy-to-use but highly versatile compression, which can be as natural or as effected as you see fit without swamping the fundamental nature of your sound and feel and response of your guitar.

- **BARGAIN**
BOSS CS-3 £79
www.uk.boss.info
A tried-and-trusted stalwart at a decent price

- **BOUTIQUE**
Diamond CPR1 Compressor £192
www.diamondpedals.com
Simple-to-use, musical opto-based compressor with tilt EQ

Height controls the cut and boost of the pedal by plus or minus 20dB

You can toggle between Clean and Dirty channels, and preserve the same settings for each

The PDF-2 has expression-pedal control for wah-wah, phaser and manual tonal shifts, using Stone Deaf's EP-1 pedal (£120)

Stone Deaf PDF-2

A two-channel clean-and-dirty EQ, boost and drive unit that's a musical toolkit for filtering the frequency emphasis of your tone

Based in Oldham and Huddersfield, Stone Deaf is perhaps best known for creating the PDF-1 Parametric Distortion Filter that's found its way onto the pedalboards of such luminaries as Nick Valensi of The Strokes and Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme, who apparently uses two PDF-1s in place of his old Maestro MPF-1 parametric filter. He might need to pop back to the North of England for an upgrade, because this recently released successor offers a lower noise floor and more versatility than the already impressive original.

The PDF-2 is all about EQ filtering and overdrive. The principles behind it are similar to the PDF-2's excellent sister effects – the Fig Fumb and Kliptonite fuzzes. On the clean channel, with the Bandwidth set to max, you can get something like a full-frequency boost by cranking the height control; tighten up the Bandwidth and the Frequency dial comes into play, allowing you to apply extreme cut or boost to any frequency range.

Switching channels brings the gain control into the equation; this ranges from beefy medium-gain overdrive to something not far short of full-on, gnarly fuzz. You can also set it up for a clean boost to live alongside chunky overdrive, versatile alt-rock tones and creative filtering options – so plenty of bang for your buck from one unit.

If you bring Stone Deaf's EP-1 expression pedal (£120) into play, then filter sweeping, wah-wah and manual tone shifting effects are all underfoot, too. Without the pedal, you can still sweep the Freq dial to emphasise your tone at a point between 35Hz to 6kHz and cut through the mix.

Overall, this is a highly musical pedal with enormous scope that excels in the alternative rock realm but could also see plenty of action in numerous other genres.

• BARGAIN
BOSS GE-7 Equalizer £75
Use this classic parametric EQ to fine-tune your drives

• BOUTIQUE
Orange Bangeetar Guitar Pre-EQ Pedal £279
EQ-able distortion with cab-sim and preamp

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £139
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel EQ, boost and overdrive pedal, made in UK, Height, Gain, Frequency, five-way rotary Bandwidth switch, channel and bypass footswitches, expression-pedal input, powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor
- **CONTACT** **www.stonedeaffx.com**

There are four adjustable waveforms: sine, triangle, pulse and – beyond 12 o'clock – rhythm, in which the effected sound repeats at preset intervals. Very cool

Eight bright blue LEDs pulse in time to the speed of the tremolo you've set and also correspond to the eight preset slots

If you have the pedal integrated into a stereo rig, Rt. Phase turns the Super Pulsar's tremolo into a panning effect

The envelope depth and rate mini controls link the effect rate to your picking dynamics, with the intensity increasing or decreasing along with the string vibration

Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar Stereo Tap Tremolo

The prolific New York brand takes one of the oldest guitar effect types to another level with this feature-packed stereo tremolo

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £219
- **DESCRIPTION** Stereo tap tremolo pedal with analogue circuitry, Volume, Rt. Phase, Wave, Shape, Depth, Wave Invert, Tap Divide, Exp mode, Envelope Depth, Envelope Rate, xRate, tap tempo, mode preset and bypass controls; stereo ins/outs; powered by 9V DC/AC adaptor
- **CONTACT** www.ehx.com

The Super Pulsar builds on EHX's popular Stereo Pulsar pedal, cramming in more sounds and adjustable controls than any trem had previously dared to incorporate. It's a phenomenally creative and musical tool that may change the way you think about one of guitar's staple effects.

Offering stereo inputs and outputs and analogue circuitry, the Pulsar is insanely versatile. Subtle amp-style sounds, optical trem, stereo panning, rhythmic patterns with up to 16 steps and reverse effects are all at your disposal. Whether you want to emulate the glorious sound of four Fender Twins on Johnny Marr's *How Soon Is Now?* riff, the stuttering amp tremolo of Keef's *Gimme Shelter*, optical trem for that *Twin Peaks* sound, or more deeply effected pulsating ambient washes, the Pulsar has the range of controls to do it.

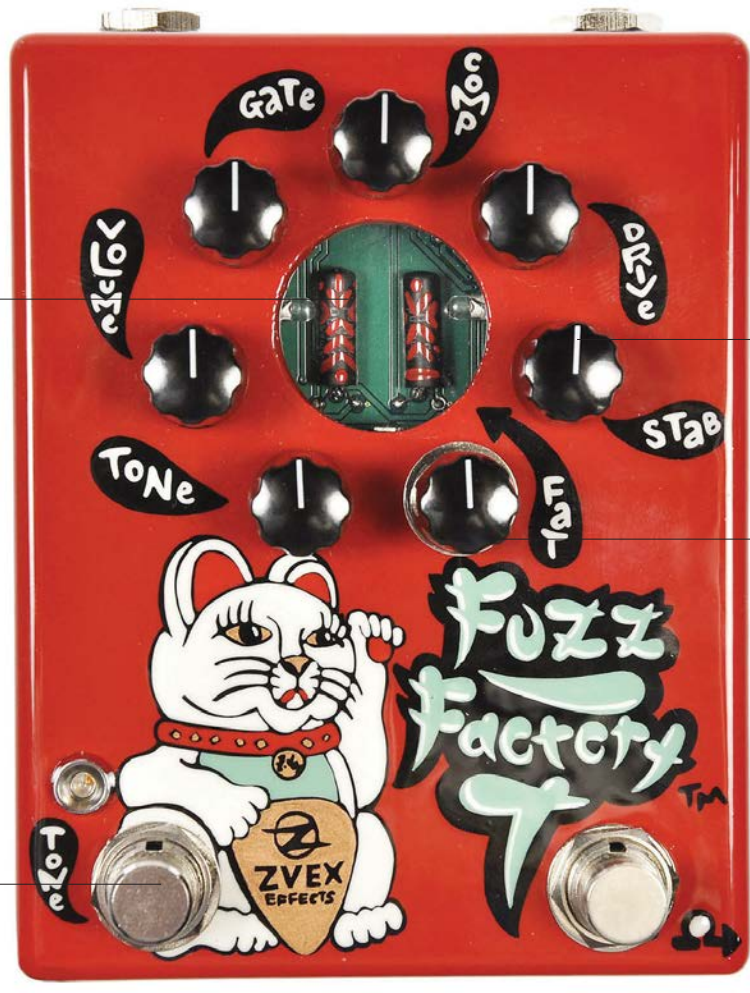
The waveforms include sine, triangle and pulse, and you have control over rate, depth, shape, phase and volume. It also comes with a mesmerising blue light show – eight blue LEDs that pulse in time to the rate of the tremolo, and indicate which of the eight presets you have selected. Those presets are another highly useful feature for live performance, allowing you to save your favourite sounds to an SD card.

There are also tap tempo and tap divide switches to ensure your tremolo is locked in time with the rest of the band, as well as an xRate button that halves or doubles the selected tempo, which can take things into the mysterious world of the ring mod.

The Pulsar's envelope depth and rate controls enable you to link the effect speed to your picking dynamics – strum a chord and the tremolo slows or speeds up as the sound dies away. Enormous fun.

• BARGAIN
Mooer Trelicopter Optical Tremolo £42
www.mooeraudio.co.uk
A tiny trem at a tidy price, that offers plenty of control over its sounds – from subtle to insane – with speed, depth and bias knobs

• BOUTIQUE
Strymon Flint £299
www.strymon.net
Combines three pulsating amp-like tremolo modes – '61 harmonic, '63 power tube and '65 photocell with a trio of reverb algorithms



Zachary Vex built the Limited Edition Fuzz Factory 7 to show off the stash of 1956 Amperex black-glass germanium transistors. Once they're gone, no more FF7s will be made

The Tone control has its own footswitch, to roll off extreme highs during your sonic explorations

Turn this left for self-oscillation, feedback and pitch and tone-metamorphosising mayhem; turn right for calm and stab(ility)

This nine-position Fat controller extends the range and possibilities of the 2013 Fat Fuzz Factory, fattening low-end sounds at lower positions and thinning at higher settings, useful for bass as well as guitar

Z.Vex Fuzz Factory 7

The original is 21 years old, and the latest iteration is Z.Vex's best product yet – but it's not going to be around forever

Minneapolis effects company Z.Vex releases hand-painted boxes of sonic sorcery from the inventive and unique mind of founder Zachary Vex. Many of them take your guitar into uncharted territory, and their ranks include such oddities as the Lo-Fi Loop Junky analogue looper, the Seek Trem step-sequenced tremolo and the Probe range (which you control by hovering your foot over them, like a theremin).

One of the company's most successful effects is the Fuzz Factory, originally released in 1995. It's beloved of experimental luminaries such as Matt Bellamy, Steven Malkmus, Nels Cline and J Mascis for its ability to warp the classic fuzz effect via a series of highly interactive controls, and combine them to conjure up unique and unholy chimeras of greasy oscillating demonic distortion into the bargain. Despite its popularity, Z.Vex has released relatively few variations on the pedal; the latest was 2013's Fat Fuzz Factory, with a three-way toggle to increase sub-harmonic options. But when Mr Vex found a stash of old Amperex germanium transistors, he decided to build the Fuzz Factory 7 to showcase them (literally – there they are in the pedal's circular viewing porthole). The FF7 extends on the Fat Fuzz Factory's sub switch with a nine-position version, and there's a new footswitchable Tone control you can bring into play to tame excess brightness or treble.

Bringing your guitar's volume control into play reveals a further range of sounds, and sound-wise, there's practically nothing it can't have a stab at – from greasy, Octavia-esque gnarl to singing sustain, to gated octave-down crunch to self-oscillation, pitch-bending harmonic squeal and more.

• BARGAIN
Z.Vex Vexter £189
www.zvex.com
Z.Vex's Vexter pedals are silk-screened instead of handpainted, but are otherwise identical versions

• BOUTIQUE
Devi Ever Truly Beautiful Disaster
£Discontinued
www.fuzzgoddess.com
A currently out-of-production cult favourite with oscillating fuzz and a photosensitive eye

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £439 (hand-painted version)
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass germanium-transistor-based fuzz pedal with 9-position Fat knob, footswitchable Tone control, Volume, Gate, Comp, Drive and Stab. Powered by 9v battery or power adaptor
- **CONTACT** www.zvex.com

ThorpyFX Fallout Cloud

A major fuzz pedal based on the classic 'Triangle' Big Muff from UK maker ThorpyFX, the Fallout Cloud may prove to be the last fuzzword for Muff addicts everywhere

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £185
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass analogue fuzz pedal with active EQ, with Volume, Sustain, Treble and Bass controls, powered by 9v battery or adaptor
- **CONTACT** www.thorpyfx.com

ThorpyFX came into being in 2014 when British Army Major Adrian Thorpe turned his attention to stompbox building in order to relieve the stress of his high-pressure day job as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist. After his first pedal, the Gunshot overdrive, proved to be a big hit with players, he turned his attention to a different kind of drive pedal – the early Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi fuzz pedals built between 1969 and 1973.

Nicknamed 'Triangle' Big Muffs due to the orientation of the pedal's three control knobs, there were approximately 17 variations on the circuit of the first production Big Muffs developed by Mike Matthews and Bob Myer. However, there was one particular vintage unit that Thorpe set out to beat, and the Fallout Cloud (previously named the Muffroom Cloud) is the result.

Because it doesn't suffer from the over-cooked distortion levels of some modern Big Muffs and Muff-derived circuits, the Fallout Cloud makes it possible to retain a great deal more control, and stays responsive to picking-hand dynamics.

The presence of separate, active treble and bass controls is a real asset, allowing you to dial in the cutting high frequencies you need to be heard in the mix and then sculpt the body of the sound beneath; with a single tone control, most Muffs simply get thinner as you wind up the treble, but here you get to fine-tune the balance of girth and grit.

The Fallout Cloud stacks well, and in action, it's capable of a great range of familiar fuzz tones, from Pink Floyd to Queens Of The Stone Age and Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys – and it cuts through a band mix better than many fuzzy equivalents, too.

- **BARGAIN**
EHX Nano Muff £39
www.ehx.com
One knob, £39, fuzz – fun!

- **BOUTIQUE**
EarthQuaker Devices Hoof £139
www.earthquakerdevices.com
Closer in character to the 90s Sovtek Muff, with a switch to scoop or boost mids

The Level control sets the volume of the Kilobyte's repeats. Inside the pedal lies a lo-fi digital delay chip that's overdriven by a 21dB preamp, resulting in warm, scuzzy repeats

The Kilobyte's modulation control applies a gentle amount of pitch shifting to the repeats. It was designed by Jack DeVille of Mr. Black Pedals

This little space invader is the guardian of the Kilobyte's Attack. Repeats get grittier as you turn the control clockwise

The Havoc switch is the Kilobyte's USP. Hold it down to max out the feedback control, resulting in glorious self-oscillation

Caroline Kilobyte Lo-Fi Delay

A lo-fi sounding digital delay with a gritty preamp and a secret weapon that enables you to create sonic Havoc

The Caroline Guitar Company, founded in Columbia, South Carolina, turned to crowdfunding to make the vision for the initial run of the Kilobyte a reality, and we sure are glad it succeeded. No member of the *G&B* team proved immune to this lo-fi pedal's charms when it arrived in the office earlier this year and it's one of our favourite delays of recent times.

This gritty-sounding digital delay takes your original dry signal path, keeps it analogue, and then smashes it via a +21dB overdrive preamp into the sort of lo-fi digital delay chip found in kids' toys. The result is gloriously scuzzy repeats with subtle warbly modulation. Fans of Electro-Harmonix's classic Deluxe Memory Man will find plenty to enjoy, with the tasty-sounding modulation circuit designed by Jack DeVille lending a sweet warble to the repeats, which have a maxmium delay time just short of a second.

The Kilobyte's attack control, represented by a cheery-looking space invader, governs the gain in the repeater preamp, and turning it up lends a dirty, overdriven edge to the repeats. However, this retro-sounding pedal has a sting in the trails, in the shape of the aptly-named Havoc control. Holding down this sturdy stomp switch cranks the feedback level set by the sum control up to maximum and results in epic high-pass filtered self-oscillation. It's enormous fun, but also very musical, as *G&B* reviewer Richard Purvis noted: "You can ride this switch through chord progressions like an accelerator, letting the noisy ambience build then lifting off just long enough to get round the corners."

The Kilobyte shows lo-fi doesn't have to mean analogue. Give it a try.

• BARGAIN
Biyang AD-10 Time Machine £39
www.biyangeffects.com
Warm-sounding analogue delay with a toggle switch for repeats up to 1,100ms

• BOUTIQUE
Strymon TimeLine £429
www.strymon.net
Its 12 delay types include lo-fi, dbucket and dtape, plus it does Havoc-like infinite delay

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £199
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass digital delay pedal, made in USA; Level, Attack, Sum, Clock & Modulation controls; Havoc switch; powered by 9V DC adaptor
- **CONTACT** carolineguitar.com

The OCD provides around 25 to 30dB of gain at its maximum setting, helping it to drive amps harder than many other pedals

The HP (High Peak) setting serves up ever dirtier and fuzzier drive with more upper-mid emphasis, while the corresponding LP (Low Peak) setting is the home of cleaner and more transparent boost and sustain

Unlike many single tone controls, rolling this only affects the high-frequency range of your sound, leaving the bass unaffected

The OCD is currently up to version 1.7 since its release in 1994, and each of the seven 'point' versions offers different flavours and tonal refinements

Fulltone OCD

An overtone-rich overdrive that preserves highs and lows while offering dynamic touch sensitivity – there's no wonder the OCD remains an obsession for tonehounds the world over

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £145
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass overdrive pedal with High Peak/Low Peak switch powered by 9v to 18v power supply or 9v battery
- **CONTACT** www.fulltone.com

California-based Fulltone, created by company founder Michael Fuller, debuted the Obsessive Compulsive Drive back in 1994. It has since become one of the biggest-selling overdrives on the market (and the best-selling hand-built) and a go-to choice for players across many genres, but back then, this was one of the instigators of what eventually became the 'boutique' pedal market we're now all hopelessly in thrall to.

Its party trick, both back then and now – and it's an ingenious trick – is to essentially create the sound and (importantly) the feel and response of an amplifier in a pedal. The OCD has a large dynamic range, and offers a continuum of usable sounds – from transparent clean boost to gritty, harmonic-laden fuzzy distortion. And all the while, it responds to the intensity of your playing style, with impressive sensitivity to changes in your pick attack and lightness of touch. Roll back your volume control and you'll reveal a world of subtle tonal colourations – Fulltone claims no other pedal cleans up like an OCD. And while the triumvirate of Drive, Volume and Tone controls might seem simplistic, the HP (think 'high gain') and LP (think 'drive and boost') settings – together with the aforementioned dynamics reproduction – give you access to a whole world of tones to manipulate.

The OCD's clarity means your Tele still sounds like a Tele and Les Paul sounds like a Les Paul in the LP mode, with little colouration; and its famed punch and sustain makes you feel as though you're playing a cranked amp in full bloom even at bedroom-volume levels. Pro players as varied as Robin Trower, Keith Urban, Joey Santiago and Paul Gilbert have all been attracted to its addictive charm and chime – we're pretty sure you will be, too.

• BARGAIN
Joyo Ultimate Overdrive £29
www.joyoaudio.co.uk
Joyo's Ultimate Overdrive captures some of the character of the OCD for a great price

• BOUTIQUE
Kingsley Jester Overdrive $375
www.kingsleyamplifiers.com
A dual-channel overdrive with two 12AX7s running at high voltage inside

The X4 offers two independent loop tracks, each with five minutes of recording time

This micro toggle enables you to store your loops, or import and export them to and from a DAW

Sync mode lets you run two loops in time and in sync, and serial lets you switch seamlessly between them

There are seven creative FX to apply, including Hold for stutter-type effects, Reverse, Fade, Half (for half speed) and Tape Stop

TC Ditto X4 Looper

A floor-based looper unit which enables you to run two loops simultaneously and add effects, without confusing the hell out of you

Many guitarists happily go about their business without every feeling the need to employ a looper during a gig. But the sound of some bands is built around the looper's ability to create an evolving wall of sound, while solo artists such as KT Tunstall (who brought the effect into the mainstream) and Ed Sheeran have relied on loop manipulation to fill stadia. Whatever your requirements, however, you don't want to be spending potential looping time thumbing through the manual working out how to use a unit, and TC Electronics has ensured that simplicity is the watchword with its Ditto range. The X4 is the sixth release in the line, and while it packs a lot of functionality, on the face of it, it looks disarmingly like a couple of Dittos housed in the same box – which it is, but there's more to it than that. Chief among its strengths is the ability to run the X4's dual loops in either Serial mode; or Sync mode, combining both at the same time, in time: something that wouldn't be possible with two Dittos. Once your loops are up and running, a master decay control regulates the fade duration of older loops as new ones are recorded, and a seven-way rotary pot accesses a selection of loop effects that can be turned on and off via footswitch – and once you're familiar, you can add tape stops, reverse, half-speed effects and more with ease. The X4 is also a useful songwriting ally, with a range of I/O options, including the ability to import and export your loops to work on in a DAW, to drag-and-drop audio files to be looped, to sync to MIDI and more. Overall, the cleverly designed interface makes this a simple-to-use tool that's both a good place to start for newcomers and a creatively rewarding tool for experienced players, which teems with sonic possibilities.

• BARGAIN
TC Electronic Ditto £105
www.tcelectronic.com
One-button operation in a nano-size chassis, but enough to satisfy the casual looper

• BOUTIQUE
Pigtronix Infinity Looper £349
www.pigtronix.com
A fully featured, MIDI-sync'd pro-level unit for loop junkies

KEY FEATURES

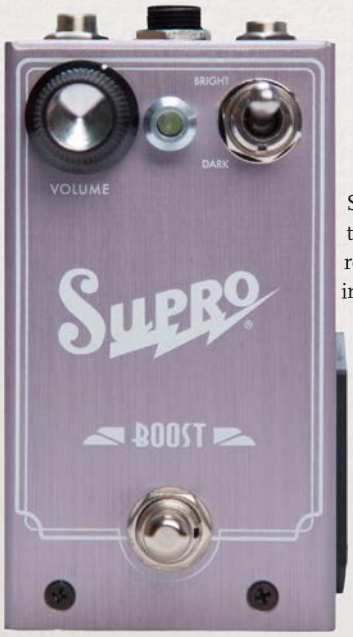
- **PRICE** £189
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass, dual-track looper pedal with effects, serial and sync modes, MIDI sync, USB MINI B connection and audio input, 9v power supply
- **REVIEWED** April 2016
- **CONTACT** www.tcelectronic.com

The 20 EFFECTS BRANDS *to watch in 2017*

From established big guns to basement start-ups, **GARY WALKER** rounds up the pedal manufacturers to look out for on both sides of the Atlantic next year and finds out what new stompboxes they're preparing to unleash

1 SUPRO

After relaunching its much-missed amp brand in 2013, Supro turned its attention to pedals, announcing its literally-titled Drive, Fuzz and Boost trio at NAMM back in January. The Drive is an absolute corker that made our 2016 Gear of The Year shortlist.



Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The Supro Drive. Putting an output transformer in a distortion pedal to fully realise the 'amp in a box' concept has resonated with customers who want authentic Supro dirt in a stompbox. Inside this award-winning pedal, we replicated the preamp, phase inverter, power amp and magnetic saturation of the original 1960s Supro tube amps."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"The Supro Tremolo. Using the same concept of replicating the actual topology of old-school tube amps, we've created a modulation and gain pedal that features a recreation of the original Valco-style tube tremolo found in Supro amps, as well as the Leo Fender-style harmonic tremolo found in Fender's coveted blonde amps of the early 1960s."

Dave Koltai, president www.suprousa.com

2 OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVORS

Having built up a wealth of collective experience working for other US pedal brands, Brady Smith and Seth McCarroll launched Old Blood Noise Endeavors, and the pair have developed a bewitching line-up of weirdly wonderful fuzz, delay and ambient reverb effects. We've been particularly impressed by the Procession, which combines reverb with filter, tremolo and flanger sounds.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Probably that we'll have jobs in 2017 – hopefully, fingers crossed, it'll be fine... but really, it's a success that we have another year of making pedals and everyone on the OBNE team has an essential role in making the business work. We also started putting out two-song cassette tape releases of bands we like under the OBNEAC name, which is fun."

Q What new pedals do you have in store for 2017?

"That's tough because we don't like to divulge too much information before the product is ready to roll. We are trying to do some weirder stuff for 2017. Weird for us and weird for the customer."

Brady Smith, co-founder oldbloodnoise.com

3 THORPYFX

This British boutique brand was founded in 2015 by former British Army Major Adrian Thorpe. Its Gunshot, Fallout Cloud, Peacekeeper and Warthog pedals quickly established the company as a master of hand-built gain machines of the highest quality.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Well, 2016 saw us introduce two new pedals, the Peacekeeper and the Warthog. We launched these pedals at our first ever guitar show, in Birmingham. This was a phenomenal success for us and allowed us to meet loads of our customers and fans, something I found really rewarding and a lot of fun. We have expanded our dealer network worldwide and we are now represented on most continents and in loads of different shops, from Nashville to Bangkok and Quebec to Melbourne.
We have also received loads of awards and praise for our pedals, which is just humbling beyond belief."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"2017 is looking like it's going to be a crazy year for us. On the near horizon we have the Chain Home and the Veteran, these are part of our vintage reimagined series. Basically, these are pedals that look to the past and improve on it for the present. I'm really loving what we've done with these and I'm certain our customers will, too. Further out, we have some really exciting products that we have been collaborating on with the pedal designing legend that is Dan Coggins of Lovetone pedals fame. These are really tricked-out modulation pedals that should blow people away. To cap it all off, we are planning to release our first valve amp, too. I may have to postpone sleep until 2018!"

Adrian Thorpe, founder www.thorpyfx.com

4 DWARFCRAFT DEVICES

This maker of handmade pedals based in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, also produces Eurorack synths. The *G&B* team were wowed by its Eau Claire Thunder fuzz – the answer to all our mid-scoop averse prayers.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The biggest success we've had this year is our team at the workshop. When you've got good people doing good work everything goes much better! After that, our Happiness [multi-mode filter] pedal. It was a pedal I've been after for quite some time, so it's really satisfying to finally have it out there, and selling pretty well to boot!"

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"We're working on a few exciting projects, including an analogue delay, a few secret digital machines and the return of our SheFuzz and Baby Thunder. 2017 is our 10-year anniversary, so we're doing a limited run of a tricked-out Great Destroyer – the first Dwarfcraft Devices pedal. We're also deep into modular synthesis. We're working on a long-term project in that world that I think we'll be showing by next summer."

Ben Hinz, owner www.dwarfcraft.com

5 STONE DEAF FX

Since launching in 2010, this North of England manufacturer has generated a buzz with innovative effects pedal and amplifier designs, such as the PDF-1 used by Queens Of The Stone Age's Josh Homme.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Going to NAMM, developing the world's first fully digitally controlled valve amplifier... Also our line of digitally controlled tremolo and delay pedals, which will be out by the end of the year. These will give Strymon and Chase Bliss a run for their money at a lower price, but with excellent build quality."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"I expect us to move into more digitally controlled analogue effects and amplifiers, building on a platform for that. The future of 'analogue' gear for people who buy boutique pedals and amps is fully midi-enabled, so you can fully utilise a GigRig, or Boss ES-8 switching capabilities. This will allow guitarists a fully integrated, connected system via MIDI, but allow them to retain an analogue world of tone. Imagine the capability of having fully MIDI-enabled digital switching of pedal order, amp channel order, pedal settings, amp settings and volume levels at the touch of one button while playing. This is the future: fusing together the digital world with analogue valve technology."

Luke Hilton, owner stonedeaffx.com

6 ANALOG MAN

Analog Man, aka Mike Piera, has been tinkering with pedals since the mid 70s. He specialises in vintage-style, high-end creations, such as the King Of Tone.

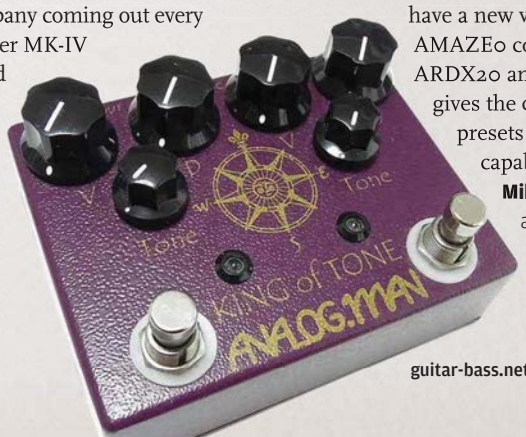
Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The continuing and expanding popularity of the King of Tone is keeping us strong while facing a new pedal company coming out every few days. Our Sun Bender MK-IV also got very popular and sold much faster than we could make them. Our 'reissue' of the coloured-graphics Sun Lion has also done well. We are also the USA order fulfilment centre for TheGigRig, and are shipping a lot of Daniel [Steinhardt]'s fantastic gear."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"We will be making more of the Sun Bender MK-IV and our Block Logo Envelope Filter, based on the old MXR. Each sold its introductory run of 100 as soon as we finished them. We also hope to have a new version of the AMAZEo controller for our ARDX20 analogue delay. It gives the delay tap tempo, presets and modulation capabilities."

Mike Piera, owner analogman.com



7 WALRUS AUDIO

Founded in 2010, Oklahoma City's Walrus Audio has expanded rapidly, with around 30 pedals now in its catalogue, many of them fuzzes and drives. *G&B*'s reviewer was impressed by the Jupiter and Vanguard, and we can't wait to check out the intriguing Janus Fuzz/Tremolo with joystick control!

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"We consider success by how many of our endorsed artists use our new releases on tour and in the studio. So this year has been huge for us in that the 385 Overdrive, Julia Analog Chorus/Vibrato and Luminary Quad Octave Generator have already been on tour all over the world and used in studios that the staff here would kill to track in for a day."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"The Monument Tap-Tremolo is next in the release chamber. This thing has an all-analogue signal path with digital LFO, and can switch between standard and harmonic tremolo with the flip of a switch. We have four other products we're wanting to push out in 2017, so make room on your boards, Walruses!"

Colt Westbrook, president walrusaudio.com

8 CATALINBREAD

Catalinbread combines modern DSP technology with analogue ideals. That's an approach the company absolutely nailed with the Topanga spring reverb and Belle Epoch tape echo – among *G&B*'s favourite reverb and delay pedals respectively.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Well, our biggest success is that we are still here. As many of your readers may know, we unexpectedly lost our friend, founder and president Nicholas Harris in March. We've been slowly but surely recovering from that tragic loss. The silver lining in that black cloud is that we've learned that we at Catalinbread are truly a family, and together we can weather major adversity and come out the other side of the storm even stronger than before. Despite the devastation of that loss, we managed to release five new pedals this year. We had a ton of support from peers in the industry, retail partners and, of course, our loyal tribe of Catalinbread believers, to whom we are forever grateful."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"We've always been a company that follows the muse. The inspiration for a design has to be irresistibly compelling to us as players before we embark on the laborious process of morphing inspiration into an actual circuit. Of primary importance is dialing in the playing feel and dynamic response of the circuit – it has to feel good at the pick or fingers, and it has to be responsive to the player's input. We will be bringing new designs to Winter NAMM that are next-level for us. New formats with expanded possibilities. While 2016 was as difficult as we could possibly imagine, we feel like we're embarking on a new journey, and we're excited to see where this new road leads us!"

Mike Erickson, customer support catalinbread.com

9 CHASE BLISS AUDIO

Joel Korte founded Chase Bliss in 2013, named in honour of his brother, killed by a drink driver in 2007. "Follow Your Bliss" had been his sibling's mantra for life. Joel's pedals give digital control to analogue designs and have been fast gaining a reputation. Look out for the superb Tonal Recall analogue delay.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The big thing for us this year was definitely the release of Tonal Recall, our analogue delay. Ever since Chase Bliss Audio launched in 2013, customers have been asking for a delay. I had been reluctant to design an analogue delay in the past because my favourite bucket-brigade delay chip, the MN3005, had long been discontinued. It got reissued in 2015, so I was completely motivated to make something. I felt an incredible amount of stress and pressure in designing it, but I couldn't be happier with the reception the pedal has got. I think that the release has really gotten the company on the map."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"It's possible we could have up to four new releases next year, but I think two is more realistic. While I can't speak to specifics, I think that the first product will be something that will satisfy a number of customers who have been asking for this genre of pedal for a long time. I have some other more 'out there' products in the works that I'm particularly excited about as well. I haven't felt this much passion and motivation for new product development since launching the company. If all goes well, we should have some exciting announcements at NAMM 2017."

Joel Korte, founder chaseblissaudio.com

10 DR SCIENTIST

Canadian husband and wife duo Ryan and Tanya Clarke are responsible for a small yet diverse range of pedals that should be on the radar of any intrepid sonic explorer, among them the Frazz Dazzler fuzz, the bizarre BitQuest and the Reverberator reverb.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The BitQuest has been a big hit, we've made over twice as many this year versus last year. It's a simple but powerful multi-effect that can make a lot of weird noises, including ring mod, pitchshifting, infinite reverb and glitch delay. More importantly, I think Mike and Neil are the main success stories in 2016. They're my Partners-In-PCB, a couple of great guys that help me do the circuit boards for the pedals. They made 2016 an awesome year."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"I'm working on three new products. First will be a new version of the Frazz Dazzler. It's getting some new features, like bass and midrange controls, a voltage starve, and a second stomp switch for low/high-gain modes. Next is a new version of the Tremolessence, my optical tremolo. It's getting a big digital overhaul and will feature MIDI control and tap tempo. The biggest project for next year will be a Eurorack version of the BitQuest with a ton of new features."

Ryan Clarke, co-owner & designer

drscientist.ca

11 HUDSON ELECTRONICS

Yorkshire's Hudson Electronics makes bespoke pedals using hand-selected components and new old stock germanium and silicon transistors on vintage-style strip boards. *G&B* was so impressed by the Broadcast germanium preamp that it earned the rare honour of a 10/10 review.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"I was very excited and pleased to receive so much positive feedback about the Broadcast. The pedal spent quite a long time in development, as I wanted to ensure it had a wide range of drive sounds whilst still being very reactive to each player's touch and retaining its own sound. Being able to speak with different musicians using the Broadcast and hearing how they put the pedal to use – from boost through to fuzz, on guitar, bass, keyboard and even in the studio as an insert effect – has been really insightful. The support from retailers has enabled me to develop a few limited-edition runs of the Broadcast, offering something a little different. I've also had some fun with custom colours and a 24-volt version."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"I'm very excited about a new compressor pedal I've been working on, which should be available in the spring. The design is sonically influenced by my favourite transistor-based studio compressors of the late 60s and early 70s. Like the Broadcast, it will interact really well with guitar and amplifier, and be capable of both subtle and over-the-top compression. I've been working on a control that allows the user to saturate the germanium-based gain make-up amplifier of the circuit so they can dial in how coloured the signal is – from subtle harmonic sheen to a characterful distortion. I'll be producing a few more limited editions of the Broadcast, including a dual-channel version, which can change gain modes with a footswitch and has separate level controls for each channel."

Michael Hudson, owner & designer

hudsonelectronicsuk.com

12 SEYMOUR DUNCAN

Seymour Duncan has been making pickups for 40 years, but its somewhat smaller stable of pedals has earned the American firm plenty of fans, too. Among its impressive roster are the Palladium gain stage, used by Joe Bonamassa, the Pickup Booster and the Shapeshifter tremolo.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The Palladium gain stage and Catalina dynamic chorus stand out as the big hits of 2016. The Palladium is the first pedal that truly captures the authentic tone, feel and responsiveness of a high-gain tube amp. The Catalina changes the world of chorus pedals with our innovative dynamic expression feature, which enables you to regulate the effect level in real time, according to how hard or soft you play."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"While we obviously can't spoil any surprises, we do have a lot in store for next year. We aren't seeking to put out any 'me too' products – for us, it's all about solving problems for players in innovative ways. We are a group of musicians that are committed to making the best products, and you can expect that we'll have some amazing-sounding pedals featuring new ways to inspire guitar players in 2017!"

Max Gutnik, SVP of products and CRO

seymourduncan.com

13 EMPRESS EFFECTS

Empress was born when founder Steve Bragg graduated from Queens University with a degree in electrical engineering and used his education to build a tremolo pedal for a friend – the rest is history...

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Without a doubt, our new Reverb pedal. It was three years in development and marks a huge step forward. We've upped our game on pretty much every aspect of the pedal, from sound quality to usability and integration. It has quickly become our best seller, and has been receiving awesome feedback from our users. And with upgradable firmware, the future is bright for this little box."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"We've got a few things coming up. Our 10th anniversary is upon us, and we're doing something special for that! We're also working on a new Superdelay 2 pedal, which will incorporate all the new features we developed for our Reverb pedal and more! On the more experimental side of things, we have a (not so) top-secret project called the Zoia. It's unlike anything we've seen out there, and will offer musicians a unique level of control over their effects. That's all I can say for now!"

Dan Junkins, vice president empresseffects.com

14 EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

Few effects brands caught the eye more in 2016 than these guys from Akron, Ohio with their way-cool soundscaping effects and gnarly fuzzes...

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Our most exciting story of 2016 has definitely been the launch of the Transmisser. The process of shooting the teaser videos with the wizard characters and the resulting buzz and positive feedback surrounding the pedal was incredible. We're really proud of the Transmisser and look forward to hearing all the creative ways musicians will use it! Other highlights from this year include our upcoming Knobs profile video, our annual company trip to Cedar Point, and of course the EarthQuaker Devices Halloween Spooktacular party."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"I can't release any specific details, but we're bringing an exciting time-based modulation effect to NAMM. Later in the year, you can expect some new pedals using the brand-new proprietary DSP platform we introduced with the Avalanche Run. We're way into using advanced DSP to create unique sounds and provide expanded expressive capabilities."

Aaron Rogers, circuit builder earthquakerdevices.com

15 T-REX ENGINEERING

One of several renowned Danish pedal manufacturers, T-Rex has been spoiling us with its range of creative stompboxes, such as the Replica, Mudhoney and multi-effect Soul Mate, since 1996. The company also makes the excellent Fuel Tank power supply series and a range of pedalboards.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"2016 has been a turning point for T-Rex as we launched the Replicator, the first of a new series of custom shop products hand-built in Denmark. We have started up production at T-Rex headquarters, which gives us great technological advantages, as we have easy access to the great sound engineering expertise we have here in Denmark. The Replicator is our take on the ultimate tape echo unit, complete with an intelligent motor that determines the rotation per minute, magnetic heads and a tape cartridge – and we've also put in tap tempo, two playback heads for three output modes and a chorus mode that modulates the pitch of the echos. We've had a lot of fun making the Replicator and we cannot wait to unveil the future hand-built projects."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"First of all, the Soulmate Acoustic, which combines five effects (full-band compressor, high-quality reverb algorithms, classic warm chorus, delay with tap tempo control, boost), a chromatic tuner and stereo looper in one. The Soulmate Acoustic also has stereo line and DI outs and expression/volume pedal input. Second, we will see more custom shop products. There is a great demand for high-end quality boutique pedals and we will do our best to fulfil this demand and focus on making Danish hand-built pedals. We might even make custom versions of some of the classic T-Rex pedals."

Ditte Vissing Petersen, sales and marketing co-ordinator www.t-rex-effects.com

16 REUSS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Anders Reuss is a Danish journalist, musician, scientist and one-man effects company who caught *G&B*'s attention with his awesome Repeater Fuzz. He also makes the Muzzbomb Warren Ellis signature for the Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds guitarist.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"The transisition to 100 per cent European manufacturing. Early on, I got circuitboards and enclosures made in China, now I work with a European electronics partner and get the enclosures drilled, painted and silk screen printed by small businesses in Copenhagen. This has meant a much improved flexibity, liberating me from the pressure of large minimum orders. Product-wise, the most significant succes stories were the releases of the Warren Ellis Muzzbomb and finally releasing the Silver Balloon Wah, which is the only DeArmond Thunderbolt clone available anywhere. It took two years to get that one done."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"There'll be a completely revised edition of my best-selling Repeater Fuzz, featuring more vintage new old stock parts and more options, still in a compact footprint. I am also working on some secret projects in the lab, which cannot revealed yet."

Anders Marcuslund-Reuss, owner www.reusseffects.com

17 KEELEY ELECTRONICS

Robert Keeley has worked in electronics since 1989 and launched Keeley Electronics in 2001, with the excellent Keeley Compressor. His new Loomer and Dark Side pedals have got the *G&B* team rather excited indeed.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"It has been the year of the workstation. Starting with the Tone Workstation, we have released seven different workstations, which feature delay, modulation and artist-inspired effects. These pedals are boutique-made multi-effects units that incorporate both modern DSP and vintage transistor designs. They feature a wide range of effects and tones in a small footprint, perfect for modern fly gigs. The Monterey was our first artist workstation, featuring Jimi-inspired tones. This pedal opened the door for the Dark Side and Loomer. This year also featured our usual array of limited-edition and speciality fuzzes. The Wolff Fuzz and the Electric Mudd are both articulate remakes of some early complex fuzz tones. The year also included the Bubble Tron, a Zappa-inspired pedal that has dynamic phase and flange, and the Hooke Reverb which offers six spring reverb effects."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"For 2017, Keeley Electronics plans on stepping up its game with an even more powerful DSP engine, and continuing work in both artist-inspired workstations and neo-vintage guitar effects. The new year will also feature effects that are true stereo, and include user-defined presets and USB support. The engineering staff at Keeley has more than doubled in two years, and we will continue to innovate and surprise guitar players with both new and old guitar effects. Neo-vintage tones designed to inspire..."

Robert Keeley, owner robertkeeley.com

18 NEUNABER AUDIO EFFECTS

Brian Neunaber founded this Californian company in 2009, putting his Masters in electrical engineering to good use. Its range of reverb pedals, such as the Immerse and Wet, combine the best of boutique and mass-produced approaches.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"Our main success has been the Immerse Reverberator. We launched this product at NAMM in response to customers who wanted all of our best reverbs in a single pedal with straightforward functionality. The Immerse has quickly become our best-selling pedal and a favourite among customers and artists alike."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"We'll be launching a new product at NAMM 2017, about which we're very excited. At first glance, it may seem like a departure from our line-up of delay-based pedals, but it has always been our plan to venture into other areas, and this is the next step in that progression. After all this build-up, I'm sure you're wondering: "what could it be?" Well, you'll have to wait for the announcement in January!"

Brian Neunaber, founder neunaber.net

19 GREER AMPS

Founded in 1998, Greer Amps specialises in dirt pedals – lots of them. Nick Greer's high-quality creations include the awesome Stinger octave fuzz, built with NOS BC-107B transistors.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"In 2016, we at Greer Amps have had many success stories, from the launch of our Super Hornet, which features the Stinger momentary octave switch, to the continued success of the Lightspeed, and the pedals that we have developed based on the Lightspeed platform. The momentary octave switch was something that I had personally dreamed of for years. The ability to 'stutter' the octave in, or hold it for a lead, then be right back in standard fuzz mode has really been a fun feature for me. We have also seen very positive reactions from the relaunch of our line of amplifiers, specifically with the Thunderbolt 30 and Apache models."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"We have got quite a few ideas that are already in development for 2017. There will be some new amp models released and, of course, new pedals as well. We are working on some new designs that are outside of the gain world – in the modulation realm. We are trying to do some things slightly different from other companies, because there are some awesome things that can be done with effects. We are continuing our analogue development and exploring options for the use of digital controller systems, while keeping the signal path all-analogue. I'm not sure if we'll go full-on into the digital aspect, but we are at least evaluating the systems that exist. I'm excited about a couple of new items in development that can give the REAL feel of an amplifier that's pushed to the edge, in a stompbox format. Things are going to get interesting!"

Nick Greer, founder greeramps.com

20 EMMA ELECTRONIC

Yet another pedal brand that suggests there's something good in the water in Denmark! Emma's ReezaFRATzitz drive is a big *G&B* favourite, while Adrian Belew is a confirmed fan of the DiscomBOBulator auto-wah.

Q What have been your main success stories of 2016?

"2016 has been a year of developing a lot of new things at Emma Electronic. One of the highlights, though, was showing the prototype of the upcoming OKTO-NØJS pedal at NAMM 2016. It's actually the first new Emma pedal in seven years, and it really caught some fantastic positive attention. An analogue, true and fast-tracking bass octave pedal, plus a totally new synth kind of fuzz, all never heard before. The combination is really cool and inspires you to be creative and inventive as a bass player."

Q What do you have in store for 2017?

"Not only will we release the OKTO-NØJS and some new updates to the classic line, but we will have a new baby line of pedals at NAMM, starting with two very different kinds of chorus and a reverb in the smallest Emma micro design ever, but with absolutely no compromise in sound. We are very proud of these Emma babies, and a whole line of new pedals on top of the NAMM launches are being baked for release in the spring or summer. This new line of mini pedals will be related to the existing pedals, but in a smaller housing. We don't want to give too much away just yet, but these will include having the OKTO pedal in a twisted version and a separate, cool NØJS pedal as well. Around summer and the fall, a new family of modulation and distortion pedals are planned, and the first listening exercises are very promising."

Jan T Behncke, founder emmaelectronic.com

Looking Forward Back

With the pedal market more buoyant than ever, what are we to expect from the future? **MICK TAYLOR** and **DANIEL STEINHARDT**, our good friends from *That Pedal Show*, offer their thoughts on what's in store for 2017 and beyond...

While the true believers (that's us, by the way) will never waver from using top-quality guitar pedals, even we didn't think the 'pedal boom' would last quite this long. And not just last, but prosper and diversify in every direction possible. Thus, we find ourselves tasked with stomping metaphorically upon the Nostradamus Drive to hear what the next decade might look like for our beloved guitar effects – unreliable beast though it is...

Shorter-term probables

EVERYTHING SMALLER

We're talking way beyond Boss GT-10 or Line 6 Helix here. We're talking nano technology, where you can have a whole modular effects system (that also sounds good) in a tiny chip, controlled by whatever interface suits you – be that an app, switching unit, maybe even physical gestures, eye movement or what have you. It might not even be physically present thanks to The Internet Of Things, enabling Wi-Fi or cellphone connectivity for control. Maybe your pedalboard will become entirely cloud-based, but used in real time.

MULTI-EFFECTS FOR PEDALHEADS

This is hardly a new idea when you think about units such as the Tech 21 Fly Rig, T-Rex Soulmate and Carl Martin Quattro; essentially, a bunch of classic pedals shoved in one big box. However, making it smaller, more pedalboard-friendly and maybe even genre/style-specific seems a good idea. That's exactly what Robert Keeley is doing with the Workstation approach. Expect lots more of this over the next year or three.

ANALOGUE DIE-HARDS EMBRACING DIGITAL

'Twas once the case that never the twain should meet... But just have a look at the likes of Chase Bliss Audio and what that company is doing with analogue circuits. You get rich-sounding, intuitive and engaging analogue effects (chorus, flanger, tremolo and plenty more) mixed with immensely powerful digital control and tweakability. Did somebody say programmability and MIDI control in a 'traditional' stompbox? You bet.

PREAMPS RETURN

Many of us are playing more quietly on stage and, as a result, the sales of mid/high-price loud valve amps are down down down. Nevertheless, we all want great tone. One potential workaround is the trend towards high-quality valve and/or solid-state preamp-type pedals (Kingsley/Van Weelden/Ethos) on pedalboards that feed directly to the effects loop return of an amp. You bypass the front end altogether. It may lead to a new breed of amps, too.

Longer-term maybes

VR COMES TO GUITAR

Put on your guitar, headset and full body suit. Select a program with eye recognition – say, Cream, live at The Royal Albert Hall in 1968 – and move your fingers to wherever the hell you like. What you see, hear and feel is yourself, in Eric Clapton's place, playing with Jack and Ginger. It's entirely real, enabling you to perceive every tiny detail, including being able to flick through his pedals and amps at the soundcheck. Next week, Quo at Live Aid. Maybe.

PARADIGM CHANGE

Digital modelling is exceptionally good and it's getting better all the time. It's convenient, satisfying and cheap to a consumer market. Then let's chuck in the fact that the manufacture of vacuum tubes is a largely dirty, dangerous and antiquated process; the kind of process that won't be around forever. So, if valve amps were to become a heritage pursuit in the way steam machinery has (ie, it's not commercially viable or relevant to do it in business), the connected markets for compatible products would become entirely different. Goodbye analogue?

ABSOLUTELY NOTHING CHANGES

Imagine a distant future world in which 14-year-old guitar enthusiasts listen to rock 'n' roll from the 1950s and 60s. They're so inspired that they beg their parents to buy them an electric guitar. They make awful noise that's strangely appealing to themselves and others. They progress through the latest tech as they develop, then by their mid-20s have saved up enough money to buy a lovely old Strat, some boutique pedals and a quality valve amplifier. Just imagine that.

For the latest from Dan and Mick, go to youtube.com/thatpedalshow

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